Fabians and 'Fabianism':
A Cultural History, 1884-1914

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This thesis is entirely my own work, except where otherwise indicated. In such instances, I have clearly referenced in full all material quoted from other sources.

Abstract

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This thesis is a cultural history of the early Fabian Society, focusing on the decades between 1884, the Society's inaugural year, and 1914. The canonical view is that 'Fabianism,' which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as the 'doctrine and principles of the Fabian Society,' is synonymous with State socialism and bureaucratic 'efficiency.' By bringing the methods of cultural history to bear on the Society's founding members and decades, this thesis reveals that 'Fabianism' was in fact used as a dynamic metonymy, not a fixed doctrine, which signified a range of cultural, and even literary, meanings for British commentators in the 1890s and 1900s (Part 1). Further, by expanding the scope of traditional histories of the Fabian Society, which conventionally operate within political and economic sub-fields and focus on the Society's 'official' literature, to include a close examination of the broader discursive context in which 'Fabianism' came into being, this thesis sets out to recover the symbolic aspects of the Fabians' efforts to negotiate what 'Fabianism' meant to the English reading public. The Fabians' conspicuous leadership in the modern education debates and the liberal fight for a 'free stage,' and their solidarity with the international political émigrés living in London at the turn of the twentieth century all contribute to this revised perspective on who the founding Fabians were, what they saw themselves as trying to achieve, and where the Fabian Society belonged—and was perceived to belong—in relation to British politics, culture, and society (Part 2). The original contribution of this thesis is the argument that the Fabians explicitly and implicitly evoked Matthew Arnold as a precursor in their efforts to articulate a kind of Fabian—latterly social-democratic—liberalism and a public vocation that balanced English liberties and the duty of the State to provide the 'best' for its citizens in education and in culture, as in politics.

Acknowledgements

One of the examples from the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry on 'ambivalent' comes from a 1965 edition of the *Cambridge Review*: 'a Ph.D. is a somewhat ambivalent acquisition: it is not always clear whether it is mentioned as a positive desideratum or a last resort.' My own experience of the DPhil at Oxford, while it did indeed have its moments, was enriched by the friends and mentors who supported me along the way.

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For what it is worth, I dedicate this thesis to my family. To my mum and dad, my gorgeous siblings Alix, Angus, Harriet, and Tom, my brother-in-law Chris and niece and nephew Mikey and Lotte, to my grandmothers Motty and Nan, and to my dearly departed Bocky and Grandpa. My family has grown and suffered loss during these years, and yet has been, distance notwithstanding, an unfailing source of support and love. I do not have the words to express what my family means to me, and can only say thank you.

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Introduction

> The Fabians form, in a theoretical respect, an exceedingly cloistered little world, deeply provincial, despite the fact that they live in London. Their philosophical inventions are necessary neither to the Conservatives nor to the Liberals. Even less are they necessary to the working class, for whom they provide nothing and explain nothing. These works in the final reckoning serve merely to explain to the Fabians themselves why Fabianism exists in the world. Along with theological literature this is possibly the most useless, and certainly the most boring, type of literary activity.[1]
>
> Leon Trotsky, 'The Fabian "Theory" of Socialism' (1925)

Any study of 'Fabianism' has first to confront the perception that it is an interminably dull topic. In an essay published in *Where is Britain Going?* (1925), Leon Trotsky expressed this view with characteristic verve, dismissing the 'works' of 'Fabianism,' along with 'theological literature,' as perhaps 'the most useless, and certainly the most boring, type of literary activity.' For Trotsky, the 'literary' methods of the Fabian Society, which conducted its business through the extant Fabian tract series, the *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (1889), lectures, manifestos, and periodical articles, were an expression of the fundamental flaw of the Fabian 'theory' of socialism itself: 'renouncing violence,' Trotsky lamented, 'the Fabians believe only in the power of the "idea."'[2]

As a Marxist revolutionary and historian of British politics, Trotsky had a particular ideological and methodological stake in judging 'Fabianism,' both as a 'type of literary activity' and as an anti-revolutionary version of socialist 'theory.' For one thing, unlike their Marxist comrades, the Fabians 'provide nothing and explain nothing' to the 'working class,' being by membership and interest a 'bourgeois' body. This was a fundamental departure from Marxist theory. At the same time, however, they were

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[1] 'The Fabian "Theory" of Socialism,' in Leon Trotsky, *Where is Britain Going?* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926), 55-56.
[2] 'The Fabian "Theory" of Socialism,' in Trotsky, *Where is Britain Going?*, 56.

equally irrelevant to the established British Conservative and Liberal parties that did represent middle-class interests. Lacking a political orthodoxy or a stable partisan alliance, the Fabians belonged outside the British political system. 'Fabianism' for Trotsky was a political anomaly—intrinsically justified and self-serving—and was consequently not only 'boring,' but irrelevant.

Throughout the twentieth century, this inveterate dullness passed from being a commonplace observation in scholarship on 'Fabianism' to being absorbed within the very vocabulary of Marxist polemic. In *Speaking to Each Other* (1970), for instance, the late cultural critic Richard Hoggart took this linguistic appropriation to extremes, regretting 'the assured narrowness of some intellectuals, a doctrinaire, anti-imaginative, Fabian-sterile single vision.'[3] Hoggart could coin this adjectival compound on the strength of the perception within his own academic community that 'Fabianism' and 'philistinism' were practically synonymous terms.[4]

From its inaugural meeting on 4 January 1884 to the outbreak of the First World War, however, the Fabian Society—which was founded on a commitment to reconstructing society for the 'general welfare and happiness' of all—attracted into its ranks some of the turn-of-the-century's most prominent literary figures.[5] Among the writers, critics, translators, journalists, and publishers who joined in these foundational decades, too numerous to name here, were Bernard Shaw, who became the Society's most prolific writer and public spokesperson, H. G. Wells, Grant Allen, Edith Nesbit, Emma Brooke, Harley Granville Barker, Rupert Brooke, Arnold Bennett, Holbrook Jackson, Constance and Edward Garnett, Alfred Orage, Hubert Bland, Ashley Dukes, and Aylmer and Louise Maude.

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[3] Richard Hoggart, *Speaking to Each Other: essays*, 2 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 124, cited in Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 161.
[4] Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis,' *New Left Review* I, no. 23 (1964), 26-53 (43).
[5] Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (London: A.C. Fifield, 1916), 33.

There is, therefore, a curious tension between the strikingly literary qualifications of the early Fabian Society's membership, and its subsequent reputation for producing a singularly 'boring' form of 'literary activity.' There is a further tension between Trotsky and Hoggart's depiction of the Fabians, one which exemplifies the kind of conceptual jarring that excites the attention of the student of cultural history: how can a group that was dedicated to 'the power of the "idea"' be, simultaneously, 'anti-imaginative' and 'sterile'? How can a body, further, which boasted some of the most prominent British novelists, playwrights, dramatists, and critics at the turn of the twentieth century be responsible for such infamously dull political writing? And further yet, how can the diverse writers and critics listed above come into being as a group, given they did not share an aesthetic programme, a positive, collective identity, or even a genre? These are the questions driving this thesis.

Why We Need to Revise the 'Old Historiography'

The Marxist historiographical tradition that promoted the narrative of Fabian sterility may itself, like 'Fabianism,' be historicised to reveal certain underlying interests and assumptions. British historian E. P. Thompson did much to shape this tradition during the 1950s and 1960s, a period during which British historians increasingly shifted scholarly attention away from geopolitical and military narratives towards 'social' histories of women, workers, and minorities written, as Thompson famously put it, 'from below.'[6] Although Thompson's formula of 'history from below' has become a hallmark of social history, the established way of writing history that he was rebutting when he first articulated this alternative has not been retained.

[6] E. P. Thompson, 'History from Below,' *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 3345 (7 April 1966), 279.

Writing in 1966, Thompson argued that in Britain, 'Labour History' had until recently been dominated by historians such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb, G. D. H. and Margaret Cole, and R. H. Tawney. In advocating 'history from below,' that is, Thompson was specifically rebutting the 'styles and methods' of Fabian historians who previously had treated 'the people' as 'one of the problems Government has had to handle.'[7] He criticised these Fabian historians for displacing the 'human' subject in favour of an officious and bureaucratic perspective, and offered 'social history' as a corrective. Thompson's was not a new complaint. As Guild socialist and one-time Fabian A. J. Penty had written in 1917, the methods of 'Fabianism' were 'far too intellectual and too little human ever to get at grips with the realities of life.'[8] The perception of the Fabians' dehumanising methods were formative in the 'new' school of 'social history,' an antagonism that has shaped the kinds of explanations that this influential school has offered of the Fabian Society and its members. Eric Hobsbawm, whom Thompson nominated as an exemplary practitioner of social history, carried this tradition to the end of the twentieth century, contributing greatly to the perception that 'Fabianism' treated 'the people'—their values and interests—as fodder for so many administrative portfolios.

Like Trotsky, Thompson and Hobsbawm wrote Fabian history from a committed, political vantage point; and, like Trotsky, they were led by a Marxist interpretive framework to relegate 'Fabianism' outside the British political tradition. Thompson, for instance, wrote of 'Fabianism' that it was 'defined by its antagonism to this [Marxist] orthodoxy.'[9] Hobsbawm, in his influential essay 'The Fabians Reconsidered,' similarly argued that their ultimate 'failure' to amount to more than a coterie of 'intellectuals' was

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[7] Thompson, 'History from Below,' 279.
[8] Arthur J. Penty, *Old Worlds for New: a study of the post-industrial state* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1917), 33.
[9] Thompson, 'History from Below,' 279.

the product of 'Fabianism''s 'remarkable a-typicality' in the context of the British political tradition.[10] Recalling Trotsky's complaint that 'Fabianism' was irrelevant to established British politics, later twentieth-century historians wove the Fabians' doctrinal exceptionalism into their narrative of its place in British history, politics, and culture. As this thesis will explore, doctrinal agnosticism was in fact a valued attribute of 'Fabianism,' and a core aspect of their identity as British 'intellectuals.'

Raymond Williams is another key historian in this tradition, importing into histories of British culture the commonplace caricature of the dehumanising Fabian socialist. Williams, who according to Anthony Barnett 'is and has always been extremely hostile to Fabianism,' identified in his influential *Culture and Society* (1958) two 'traditions' of 'Fabianism.' One, 'in the orthodox person of Sidney Webb, is the direct inheritor of the spirit of John Stuart Mill; that is to say, of a utilitarianism refined by experience of a new situation in history'; the other, represented by Bernard Shaw, effectively married Webbian 'utilitarianism' to Victorian culture, 'telling Carlyle and Ruskin to go to school with Bentham, telling Arnold to get together with Mill.'[11] While Williams tantalisingly recognised the Victorian cultural resonances feeding 'Fabianism,' by sequestering and silencing this alternative version—Shaw, he tells us, is not 'the normal Fabian'—and foregrounding the Webbian 'utilitarian' version as true 'Fabianism,' he missed an opportunity to explore more fully the cultural issues and inheritances at work.

This thesis attempts to redirect our scholarly attention back onto the cultural aspects of 'Fabianism' that Williams, for his own intellectual and political reasons, set to

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[10] Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: studies in the history of labour* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), 252.
[11] Anthony Barnett, 'Raymond Williams and Marxism: A Rejoinder to Terry Eagleton,' *New Left Review* 1, no. 99 (1976), 47-64 (57); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), 181-2.

one side. This effort began in the 1980s when Ian Britain, informed by the 'cultural turn' in history, argued in *Fabianism and Culture* (1982) that we need to take 'Fabianism' out of the political and economic sub-fields of history within which it had previously been confined, and place it into a broader, cultural framework. 'Most commentators,' Britain observed in his 'study of British socialism and the arts,' 'have painted Fabian socialism as a narrowly utilitarian programme of social and administrative reform, preoccupied with the mechanisms of politics and largely oblivious of wider, more "human" issues.'[12] This is a critique in which Williams and the Marxist tradition is implicit. More recently, Mark Bevir reiterated this concern, claiming in *The Making of British Socialism* (2011) that 'far too many historians have caricatured the Fabians as bureaucratic elitists who were inspired by utilitarianism and classical political economy.' Revising this caricature involves revising what Bevir calls the 'old historiography' of Marxism.[13]

In its own contribution to the reconsideration of the 'utilitarian,' 'dehumanising' Fabian caricature, this thesis makes use of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the 'field of cultural production.' That this theory is relevant to a cultural history of 'Fabianism' needs some explanation, which is offered below: in the meantime, Bourdieu's corrective to what he sees as the deterministic bias of the Marxist method provides a point of departure for critiquing the 'old historiography' above. Bourdieu warned that the 'external mode of analysis' that characterises the Marxist method, or its blunter application, tends to 'short-circuit' the relationship between 'external determinants,' such as 'economic crises' and 'political revolutions,' and the work of art or cultural product. The cultural product—'Fabianism' can and should be construed, this thesis argues, as a cultural 'artefact'—does not simply 'reflect' these 'external

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[12] Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture: a study in British socialism and the arts, 1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), i, 5.
[13] Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 132.

determinants': rather, the 'intellectual world' indirectly 'refracts' them through a 'prism' of 'specific interests' held by various individuals in the 'field.'

> It is this peculiar universe, this 'Republic of Letters,' with its relations of power and its struggles for the preservation or the transformation of the established order, that is the basis for the strategies of producers, for the form of art they defend, for the alliances they form, for the schools they found, in short, for their specific interests.[14]

We can view 'Fabianism' as, with Trotsky, a kind of 'literary activity,' both in the sense of its being conducted through highly literate means over other kinds of political activity—print literature and lectures rather than violent agitation or protest—and in the sense that it involved a public performance, an intervention into public life from a position outside the political field. As a topic of study, 'Fabianism' is patient, therefore, of the kinds of 'struggles' and power plays between individuals and groups attempting to 'preserve' or 'transform' the *status quo* that Bourdieu attributes to the 'field of cultural production.' As Bourdieu elaborates elsewhere, 'few people depend as much as artists and intellectuals do for their self-image upon the image others, and particularly other writers and artists, have of them;' and again, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre, '"there are […] qualities that we acquire only through the judgements of others."'[15] As a group of 'intellectuals' entering British public life, and as subjects of subsequent historical scrutiny, the founding Fabians 'struggled' to negotiate—a process that, as Bourdieu suggests and history proves, is frequently 'doomed to failure'—what being a Fabian and 'Fabianism' meant. It was these 'struggles,' rather than the 'external,' historical 'determinants,' that shaped the decisions and self-fashioning of the Fabians from the founding years through to the First World War.

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[14] 'Principles for a Sociology of Cultural Works,' in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: essays on art and literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012 [1993]), 176-91 (80-82).
[15] 'The Field of Cultural Production,' 29-73 (31); 'The Market of Symbolic Goods,' in Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 112-41 (16).

Evading the Scylla of Marxist historiography, however, this revised interpretation of 'Fabianism' runs up against the Charybdis of 'literary modernism.' In their novels, criticism, and even poetry, the 'literary modernists' caricatured the Fabians not just as dull, but dangerous. In the hands of Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf in particular, 'anti-imaginative' 'Fabianism' threatened the very driving forces of the version of literary culture they sought to defend. Anticipating Thompson's accusations from the 1960s, for instance, Ezra Pound wrote in the self-consciously literary *Little Review* in 1920 that the literary artist was under threat from the 'unhumanizing' Fabian 'bureaucrat' who treated man as a 'social unit.'[16] In this article, published in the same issue as Episode V of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Pound dismissed 'poor old Shaw' as an 'amusing, uncultured old satirist' who was 'pretty far gone when he had to take up with the Sidney Webbs.' Woolf too, in *Jacob's Room* (1922) as elsewhere, caricatured the 'scrubbing and demolishing' 'elderly' Fabians through the eyes of a younger generation.[17] While their polemic is driven by the logic of the 'field'—them *versus* us, 'Webbist committees' *versus* 'the individual soul,' 'old' Fabians *versus* young modernists—in repeatedly singling out and alienating the 'unhumanizing' Fabians, 'modernists' like Pound implicitly recognised the Fabians as competitors in the cultural field (Chapter 2).

The anxieties underlying the 'literary modernists'' targeted alienation of the Fabian socialists provide a principal focus for Ann Ardis's *Modernism and Cultural Conflict* (2002). In her first chapter in particular, Ardis reads in 'Pound's caricature of the Webbs as Fabian Socialists, who believed "that the arts had better not exist at all,"' certain 'professional and disciplinary anxieties' that expressed themselves through his gendered polemic. Pound's 'caricature' in 'The Serious Artist' (1913), for instance, of

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[16] Ezra Pound, 'Economic Democracy,' *Little Review: a magazine of the arts, making no compromise with the public taste* 6, no. 11 (April 1920), 1-64 (40).
[17] Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (London: Hogarth Press, 1980 [1922]), 33.

Beatrice Webb as '"poetry-blind," "fiction-blind, and drama-blind,"' is a 'by-product' 'of the renegotiation of disciplinary boundaries' that began at the turn of the twentieth century.[18] Chapter 2 of this thesis furthers Ardis's observation, revealing that in fact Pound's ideal of the male aesthete who stands in direct opposition to the feminine, Fabian 'social scientist' rehearsed a gendered binary and territorialism first performed by defenders of 'pure' literary culture in the early 1890s.

The 'literary modernists'' interpretation of 'Fabianism' has been consecrated through their own status within the Western literary canon, and the institutionalisation of English literature as a university discipline. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the rhetoric and conclusions of this interpretation consequently endure in current scholarship on turn-of-the-century literary culture and the British socialist movement. In *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism* (2007), for instance, Ruth Livesey phrases her interpretation of 'pragmatic Edwardian socialism' and literary culture through the terms set out in Woolf's modernist polemic. 'Fabianism' provides Livesey's need for a counter-example separating the twin peaks of William Morris' political aesthetics from the 1880s, and its afterlife in Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury circle. Using a periodization and rhetoric borrowed from Woolf's writing—such as, for instance, a 1922 letter Woolf sent to her tutor Janet Case contrasting the unimaginative 'Edwardians' to 'we Georgians' (Chapter 2)—Livesey argues that the Fabians, as 'Edwardian high realists and political pragmatists,' 'reduc[ed] aesthetics to a functional social good,' and that 'Shaw's Fabian generation' shared a 'utilitarian approach to aesthetics.'[19] This is the kind of scholarly recapitulation of modernist polemic that this thesis challenges.

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[18] Ann L. Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15-44 (8).
[19] Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194-5, 203. See Virginia Woolf to Janet Case, 21 May 1922, Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1975-1980), Vol.2, 529.

The two dominant narratives that this thesis is positioned against and attempts to historicise, therefore, are 'literary modernism,' which in this thesis retains the 'exclusionary' self-labelling of the 'Joyce-Pound-Eliot' and Woolf nexus that Ardis, Bonnie Kime Scott, Maria Di Battista, and others involved in the 'new modernist' revisionist studies found useful, and the British Marxist tradition, particularly as practiced by scholars associated with Birmingham School of Cultural Studies.[20] These narratives have throughout the twentieth century imposed and perpetuated a caricature of the early Fabians and 'Fabianism' as 'dehumanizing,' 'bureaucratic,' and 'boring,' and have silenced the 'struggles' for cultural legitimacy and self-definition out of which this caricature arose.

What is Cultural History?

Given that this thesis shares Ian Britain's desire to 'remedy the neglect of the cultural and aesthetic aspects' of Fabian socialism, a word must be said on the differences between a history of culture, such as *Fabianism and Culture*, and a cultural history. Partly, this is a difference of inflection. Britain investigates the literal dimension of the Fabians' engagement with culture. His positivist methods involve statistical analyses of, for instance, 'the proportion of lectures devoted to the arts at Fabian Summer schools,' and 'the percentages of lectures relating to literary or artistic material, delivered to the central London branch of the Fabian Society, 1884-1914' in order to revise the

[20] Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, 4-5. See also for 'new modernist' studies: Maria DiBattista, *High and Low Moderns: literature and culture, 1889-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism*, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). For the social history tradition, see: Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961); Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957); Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the crisis of the left* (London: Verso, in association with Marxism Today, 1988); Stuart Hall, *Culture, Media, Language: working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79* (London: Hutchinson; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1980); Terry Eagleton, 'The Rise of English Studies,' in *Literary Theory: an introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

'philistine reputation of the Fabians.'[21] Bringing a quantitative method to the official archives of the Fabian Society, Britain establishes that its founding members did, contrary to popular and scholarly perceptions, openly engage with questions of, for instance, Romanticism, literature and the arts, and the 'pleasures' of oratory.

While sharing an interest in the crossovers between 'Fabianism' and culture, Britain's methods led him to offer different kinds of interpretations, or explanations for this historical phenomenon. He comes to terms with the conspicuous prevalence of dramatists, actors, and managers in the Society, that is to say, from the perspective of social history. He attributes to the Fabians a 'highly developed, if only semi-conscious' interest in the theatre, what he calls a 'histrionic impulse' prevalent among the leisured, 'bourgeois' class. As he writes in one chapter called 'Platform or Playhouse,' 'as people interested in the arts of influencing others,' the Fabians 'must have felt a natural attraction to theatre.' In the 'holiday atmosphere of the Summer Schools,' the Fabians felt 'relaxed enough' to indulge this 'impulse.'[22] This kind of interpretation considerably downplays the Fabians' investment in modern theatre, both as a vehicle for social and moral reform, and as a space that should be free from political interference. As Chapter 4 explores below, a cultural-historical perspective provides another interpretation of this conspicuous clustering, one with a richer significance than a 'bourgeois' enjoyment of theatre sports.

Cultural history, while marked by its own 'varieties, debates and conflicts,' brings an alternative to class-based readings to the methodological challenges of studying culture.[23] After decades as a prominent theorist in the field, Peter Burke offered this definition in the inaugural issue of the disciplinary journal *Cultural History* in 2012:

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[21] Britain, *Fabianism and Culture*, 7, 193, 209.
[22] Britain, *Fabianism and Culture*, 210.
[23] Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* , 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2008 [2004]), 12.

> Cultural history is best regarded not as a field with a fence around it but rather as a history written from a particular angle or viewpoint, concentrating on the symbolic element in all human activities.[24]

This may be compared with T. Ashplant and Gerry Smyth's more anthropological definition from *Explorations in Cultural History* (2001):

> Cultural history, as we define it, is concerned with the historical analysis of a range of cultural 'artefacts.' Such artefacts may be anything produced by human activity: written texts, but also visual texts, buildings, and other discrete material objects, as well as artefacts of greater complexity and more problematic identity, such as social practices and institutions, which require the historian first to reconstruct them as an object of knowledge before interpreting them.[25]

If cultural history is a perspective rather than a fixed method or 'field,' we need to be cautious in making hard and fast distinctions *vis-à-vis* a history of culture. Burke and Ashplant's shared interest in the 'symbolic' or 'meaning-making' processes behind 'human activities,' however, and their broad interpretation of the sources available to the historian as not only written but also visual 'texts,' and social and institutional identities, informs the methods of this thesis.

Within the 'new cultural history,' Dominick LaCapra and Hayden White are recognised leaders of an approach that prioritises literary, over anthropological or sociological, strategies. LaCapra in particular, informed by Bakhtinian and Derridian theory, advocates importing strategies from 'literary criticism,' such as 'narrative structure, voice, perspective, and subject-position,' to the 'writing of history.'[26] Language in this model is not 'causal' or 'constructivist,' but reciprocal. In his most recent work, *History, Literature, Critical Theory* (2013), LaCapra argues that 'how language is used and how that use varies over time and place,' even 'in the same text or discourse,' 'is a problem bound up with many other crucial problems and processes, and for that very reason it deserves a prominent place in the critical and self-critical historiography.'

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[24] Peter Burke, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Cultural History,' *Cultural History* 1, no. 1 (2012), 1-13 (1, 7).
[25] T. G. Ashplant and Gerry Smyth, *Explorations in Cultural History* (London: Pluto, 2001), 5.
[26] Dominick LaCapra, *History, Literature, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 9.

While LaCapra criticises Bourdieu's 'contextualising' theory of the 'field' (with its 'one-dimensional' reading of 'literature' as 'symptomatic of social forces') as 'a well-tended victory garden,' his own focus on language—how texts are 'read, used, and abused in different social groups, institutions, and settings'—provides a useful perspective for approaching 'Fabianism' as a 'text' or cultural 'artefact' that served a function for individuals and groups thinking about questions of British cuture and politics at the turn of the century.[27]

Drawing on the methods and ideas outlined above, this cultural history of the Fabians and 'Fabianism' before the First World War operates in the discursive space mapped out between institutional history, intellectual history, and literary studies. It treats 'Fabianism' not as a static noun to be explained, but a fluid and shifting metonymy—a cultural product or 'text'—that was 'read, used, and abused' by groups and individuals who, like the 'literary modernists' and Marxist historians, had vested interests in dominating what 'Fabianism' meant, including other 'intellectuals,' writers, political commentators, and self-labelling 'men of letters' from the 1890s onwards.

This is a timely revision. Britain, and indeed the world, has now seen one hundred and thirty years of Fabian socialism. While the Fabian 'think-tank' model of today is a departure from the Society's founding conditions (Chapter 1), the questions that the early Fabians confronted at the dawn of the twentieth century nonetheless endure in the first decades of the twenty-first. The early Fabians were among the first British public figures described as 'intellectuals' to confront the fraught nature of autonomy when entering political debates: if we think of Stephen Fry's open letter to the British Prime Minister to boycott the Russian Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014 over Vladimir Putin's violation of gay rights, or Jamie Oliver's efforts to raise awareness of

[27] Dominick LaCapra, *History & Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 129; LaCapra, *History, Literature, Critical Theory*, 16-18.

child nutrition and school meals in Britain, we can find precedents in, for instance, Edith Nesbit's calls for the British public—or rather, the educated, liberal sub-section of the public—to protest against the British Government's proposed trade alliance with 'autocratic' Russia in 1907 (Chapter 5), or Hubert Bland's 1905 Fabian tract, '"After Bread, Education"' which, quoting French revolutionary Georges Danton, advocated for the State provision of meals for England's public school children (Chapter 3).[28] In his own open letter, Fry quotes Edmund Burke's affirmation, 'all that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing,' an aphorism that Shaw riffed on in *The Devil's Disciple* (1901): 'the worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity.'[29] While demanding change, neither Fry nor Shaw advocated violence: it is the 'power of the "idea,"' a sense of public duty, and a liberal ideal of 'humanity,' that motivates their forays into the field of practical politics, and which was vital, this thesis argues contrary to prevailing opinion, to early 'Fabianism.'

Archives

The extensive Fabian Society archives have long provided a key resource for traditional histories of 'Fabianism.' Housed at the London School of Economics, this resource includes not only the Fabian tract series started in 1884—now largely available online—but also meeting minutes, reports, correspondence, and even an extensive collection of Bernard Shaw's photographs that vividly captures the literary networks and social circles that the Fabians enjoyed outside their London-bound 'committee' contexts

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[28] Hubert Bland, *"After Bread, Education": a plan for the state feeding of school children*, vol. 120, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, 1905); Stephen Fry, An Open Letter to David Cameron, (7 August 2013), http://www.stephenfry.com/2013/08/07/an-open-letter-to-david-cameron-and-the-ioc/. July 2014; Jamie Oliver, 'Jamie Oliver Food Foundation,' http://www.jamieoliverfoodfoundation.org.uk/. September 2014.

[29] Bernard Shaw, *Three plays for Puritans: The devil's disciple, Caesar and Cleopatra, and Captain Brassbound's conversion*, Rev. and repr. standard ed. (London: Constable, 1931), Act II, 30.

(Image 1). Alan McBriar's canonical *Fabian Socialism and English Politics* (1962) is typical of the approach of the 'old historiography' to this archival resource. McBriar's study is 'concerned mainly with Fabian doctrine,' and aims to 'expound Fabian Socialism in an historical and critical way.' The 'tracts and other official publications of the Fabian Society are,' therefore, 'taken as authoritative source of the doctrine' of 'Fabianism,' with only 'incidental' reference to 'the history of the Society' or to 'the Fabians as individuals.'[30]

Image 1 Bernard Shaw, Harley Granville Barker, and the publisher Grant Richards, nephew of Grant Allen, diving off the south coast, LSE Archives, Bernard Shaw Collection, 1/17/415

While this LSE archive is invaluable, it has its limitations. The Fabian tracts, for instance, which McBriar and others historians routinely 'took' as an 'authoritative source' of 'Fabianism,' were in fact frequently published with a disclaimer that resists any effort to impose a singular definition on 'Fabianism.' The disclaimer, for instance,

[30] A. M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), ix.

found in Kinglsey Amis' 1957 tract, 'Socialism and the Intellectuals,' had been in use in one form or another since the earliest tracts printed in the 1880s:

> Note.—This pamplet, like all publications of the FABIAN SOCIETY, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement.[31]

Amis followed up this official disclaimer with his own insistance: 'I must explain at once that the views I shall express are very far from being the views of the Fabian Society.' In what will become a familiar manoeuvre, this Fabian disclaimer balances the demands of autonomy—members' freedom of thought and speech, and the Society's resistance to conformity to external pressures, such as economic theories and socialist doctrine—and the desire for the authority to speak for the views of 'Socialists' from around 'the world.' The fraught nature of autonomy, which as Bruce Robbins observes in *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics* (1990) is a systemic source of 'confusion' over the function and value of the public intellectual, was a recurrent problem for the Society in its founding decades, and accounts at least in part for its depiction by doctrinally more established individuals and groups as standing for nothing, speaking for nothing, generative of nothing.[32]

The archive also excludes and marginalises voices that were a constitutive part of the discursive context in which 'Fabianism' as a meaningful 'artefact' first came into being and was contested. The losing sides of the debates held within the London Society, the archives of its provincial chapters and contemporary socialist organisations such as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), and the perspectives of the English public that the Society sought to 'socialize' are not registered in this 'official' archive of 'the Fabian,' as the London-based original Society was known.

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[31] Kingsley Amis, *Socialism and the Intellectuals*, vol. 304, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, 1957), 1.
[32] Bruce Robbins, *Intellectuals: aesthetics, politics, academics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), ix-xxvii (xxi).

In its aim to recover the 'struggles' through which 'Fabianism' came into being as a meaningful term, this thesis therefore reintegrates documents other than, or in complement to, the canonised and authorised. If 'Fabianism' has survived through these stable records, it was nonetheless initially negotiated by individuals and groups in more ephemeral and interactive settings, through letters to editors, opinion pieces, commentaries, and manifestos printed in the periodical press. The effort to recover this record is more viable than ever with the increasing sophistication and scope of searchable online periodical databases. Of particular use for the student of the history of British literature, politics, and culture are the *Times* and *Times Literary Supplement* online archives, which are administered by Gale Cengage Learning and cover 1785 to 1985, and 1902 to 2009 respectively; the two collections of the ProQuest British Periodicals database, which provides searchable facsimile images of around 500 leading journals and newspapers from the 17th to the 20th century, and which is cross-referenced with the Wellesley Victorian Periodicals Index to assist identifying unsigned or 'orphan' articles; and the Brown and Tulsa Universities Modernist Journals project (MJP), which continues to digitise key modernist titles from 1890 to 1922.[33] An invaluable resource not readily available to earlier twentieth-century histories, or 'Histories,' of the Fabian Society, these online databases record the public tussles over what 'Fabianism' meant, who the Fabians were and what they wanted, and where they belonged, or were perceived to belong, in relation to British politics, culture, and society.

[33] Company ProQuest Information and Learning, British Periodicals (1681-1939), Reprint Edition: ProQuest Information and Learning Company), www.britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk ; The TImes Digital Archive, 1785-1985, Reprint Edition: Gale Cengage Learning Copyright 2011), http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/dispBasicSearch.do?method=getFields&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=oxford&finalAuth=true ; The Times Literary Supplement Digital Archive, 1902-2009, Reprint Edition: Gale Cengage Learning Copyright 2012), http://find.galegroup.com/tlsh/basicSearch.do?finalAuth=true ; Brown and Tulsa Universities, The Modernist Journals Project: 'Modernism Began in the Magazines', Reprint Edition; 2014-), http://www.modjourn.org .

'Fabianism' and the 'Power of the "Idea"'

The two-part organisation of Part 1 reflects this process of negotiation, contrasting the Fabians' efforts to articulate their own sense of who they were and what they saw themselves as doing as a Society (Chapter 1), to how various individuals and groups negated or negotiated this Fabian self-understanding before the English reading public (Chapter 2). This comparative approach reveals that far from being limited to 'the doctrines and principles of the Fabian Society,' as the *Oxford English Dictionary* records and as McBriar and others treat it, 'Fabianism' in fact signified in the 1890s and early 1900s a suite of meanings that were cultural, and specifically literary, rather than strictly political or 'doctrinaire.'

The ideas and themes that emerge from the negotiations over 'Fabianism' in Part 1 provide opportunities to deepen our understanding, in Part 2, of the 'symbolic elements' of the Fabians' efforts to carve out a space for themselves in a public domain dominated by other more established and aspiring political parties, social movements, and cultural interests. The rationale behind Part 2 is two-fold: first, it investigates one area—the liberal opposition to the statutory censorship of the theatre—not previously considered relevant to the study of 'Fabianism' when scholarly interests focused predominantly on 'official' Fabian literature within the parameters of economic and political history; and second, it reconsiders two recurrent chapters in Fabian history—the Edwardian education debates, and questions about nationalism, internationalism, and socialism—from the new perspectives of cultural history to reconsider the canonical view on the Fabians' role in these areas.

One of the enduring clichés of scholarship on 'Fabianism' is its association—and indeed in the hands of Thompson, Hoggart and others, synonymy—with 'bureaucratic' processes and 'efficiency.' We can historicise this association back to the earliest

responses from Marxist critics and the aspiring literary *avant-garde* of the 1910s. In a 1900 *Saturday Review* piece, for instance, the Marxist leader Ernest Belfort Bax condemned Shaw and the Fabian 'bureaucrats'' efforts 'to point out the evils of the capitalist system to the "ordinary, respectable citizen,"' while ignoring the revolutionary ambitions of the 'Old Guard.'[34] By cross-reading this cliché with the Fabians' recognised contribution to the Edwardian education debates—in which it was a prominent feature—it becomes evident that in their aspirations towards a national system of education, and the requisite State organisation this system would require, the Fabians explicitly and implicitly acknowledged Matthew Arnold as a precursor for their position. As Chapter 3 shows, the Fabians found common ground in the Arnoldian idea of the State as a 'centre of light and authority' that needed sound administration if it were to provide 'the best' education for the nation's young.[35]

The peculiar, and peculiarly Arnoldian, balance of 'light' and 'authority' that characterises the Fabians' position on the education debates informed their position in another context long overlooked in traditional histories: namely, in their leadership of the early twentieth-century opposition to statutory censorship of the theatre. In the fight for a 'free stage,' part of a longer tradition of liberal opposition to dramatic censorship inherited from the eighteenth century, playwrights, managers, and actors associated with the Fabian Society played a key role. In keeping with the descriptions of cultural history above, the conspicuous clustering of Fabians who were professional dramatists opposed to censorship is interesting not simply for its own sake, but in terms of how this diverse group—a cursory list might include Fabians Bernard Shaw, Harley Granville Barker, Charles Charrington, and Edward Garnett, as well as Ashley Dukes,

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[34] E. Belfort Bax, 'Socialism and Republicanism,' *Saturday Review* 90, no. 2349 (3 November 1900), 552-53 (648).
[35] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy; with Friendship's garland and some literary essays*, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 134.

Herbert Trench, and Frederic Whelen—come into being *as* a group, given they did not share an aesthetic programme, and actively rejected the identity of 'Fabian' dramatists. Rather, as this chapter shows, they shared a liberal vision of the playwright and manager as individuals whose interests were threatened when Governmental anxieties about obscenity or public 'decency' led to the breach of their common liberties and interests.

That the solidarity felt between British writers involved in the fight for a 'free stage' operated at an international level is the principal argument for Chapter 5. This argument undermines another commonplace in the conventional scholarship on 'philistine' 'Fabianism,' namely that it was a largely nationalist theory of socialism dedicated to home politics to the exclusion of international affairs. Trotsky's caricature of the 'deeply provincial' Fabians living within yet cut off from cosmopolitan London in the early twentieth century traded on this perception. Recent developments in cultural internationalism, however, which its practitioners position against the dominant narratives of Marxist internationalism, contribute to this thesis's cultural-historical efforts to reclaim the 'symbolic elements' of the Fabians' struggles to define 'Fabianism' before the First World War.[36] By paying attention to the broader discursive field with the requisite 'open-mindedness' of the discipline, it becomes clear that the Fabians imagined themselves as part of an international community of writers and 'intellectuals' who found in their own position as writers and that of Russians working under the censorious conditions of tsarist Russia common grounds for sympathy.[37] As translators

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[36] Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Akira Iriye, *Global Community: the role of international organizations in the making of the contemporary world* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002 http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.90009) Electronic text and image data; Bruce Robbins, *Feeling Global: internationalism in distress*, Cultural Front (London: New York University Press, 1999).
[37] Lynn Hunt, ed. *The New Cultural History*, Studies on the History of Society and Culture (London: University of California Press, 1989), 22.

and literary critics, the Fabian socialists Constance and Edward Garnett, Aylmer and Louise Maude, and indeed Bernard Shaw, contributed to the dissemination in English of Russian intellectual history, and the concept of the '*intelligentsia*' that opened up space for an English equivalent.

As a highly literate, cultural 'elite' committed to social reform, the Fabians did indeed believe in what Trotsky derided as the 'power of the "idea."' In fact, this conviction could be seen as a defining feature of 'Fabianism,' as this cultural history—which puts the 'human' subject supposedly absent back into the study of 'Fabianism'—sets out to show. That the Fabians cultivated a liberal understanding of the value and function not only of 'literature,' in the Arnoldian sense of 'everything written with letters or printed in a book,' but also of public education and the public duty of the 'intellectual,' is one of the principal arguments and original contributions of this thesis.[38]

Why a Reconsideration of 'Fabianism' Matters

As a fluid metonymy that had no fixed meaning throughout the 1890s and early 1900s, 'Fabianism' was 'read, used, and abused' by individuals and groups with interests vested in asserting their own authority in British public life. While this process of appropriation was increasingly shut down as 'literary modernism'—which before the 1910s, as Ardis notes, did 'not (yet) throw gigantic shadows' over the British 'cultural landscape'—increasingly came to stand as a synecdoche for the whole, this thesis uncovers a range of contexts in which 'Fabianism' signified a set of cultural, and specifically literary, meanings before the First World War.[39]

Before this 'highly selected version of the modern' triumphed, 'Fabianism' was recognised by contemporaries as one version of a whole range of 'modernisms'

[38] 'Science and Literature,' in Matthew Arnold, *Philistinism in England and America*, Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1974), 53-73 (58).
[39] Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, 2.

transforming British intellectual, social, and political life.[40] The Fabians and 'Fabianism' were associated, we shall see throughout, with practically every expression of the 'new' that, as Holbrook Jackson, himself a Fabian, observed, was used to 'indicate extreme modernity' across all walks of life throughout the 1890 and early 1900s.[41] With the 'new journalism' of Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, the 'new woman' of Grant Allen and Emma Brooke, the 'new theatre' associated not only with Shaw, but with Charrington, Granville Barker, Garnett and others, even the 'new teaching' and the 'new internationalism,' the Fabians and instances of 'extreme modernity' went hand in hand for the British reading public before the First World War. This thesis provides an opportunity, therefore, to bring the 1890s and the so-called 'modernist moment' together, contextualising Ezra Pound's famous clarion call to the literary *avant-garde* to 'make it new' as an anxious effort to wrest the authority to adjudicate on questions of literary and cultural significance from the Fabian proponents of 'the new.'

This thesis also provides a chance for reconsidering the place that twentieth-century scholarship affords Matthew Arnold in British culture, politics, and society. Again, this proposal involves being sceptical of the themes and conclusions put forward by Marxist historians for whom Arnold stood in as a whipping boy for 'high culture,' notably Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, Chris Baldick, and Terry Eagleton.[42] In critiquing the Marxist historiography on 'Fabianism,' that is, we can consequently critique this tradition's treatment of Arnold, who in many senses may be described as a proto-Fabian. In his idea of an 'alien' portion of society—a section motivated not by class interests but by 'a general *humane* spirit'—Arnold anticipated aspects of the Fabians'

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[40] Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: against the new conformists* (London: Verso, 1989), 33.
[41] Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: a review of art and ideas at the close of the nineteenth century* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), 21.
[42] See for instance James Walter Caufield, *Overcoming Matthew Arnold: ethics in culture and criticism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 86-90.

belief in the role of the State in the education and elevation of all citizens according to merit, not class. In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Arnold envisaged a role for the State—a 'source of authority'—in supporting and encouraging the 'extrication of the best self' in the greatest number of people: the 'number of those' endowed with this 'happy instinct' for 'the love of human perfection' is proportionate, he claimed, to 'the hindrance or encouragment which it meets with from without.'[43] Through such evocations of a role for the State in the education and 'betterment' of society (a kind of statist liberalism), and an ideal of the vocation and the duty of the 'disinterested,' public intellectual, Arnold provides a precursor to a position that the Fabians' explicitly claimed as their own. Further, through his own acknowledged influence upon British cultural institutions such as the BBC, National Trust, and Arts Council, Arnold initiates 'Fabianism' into a British tradition of state liberalism and culture that stretches into the twentieth, and arguably the twenty-first, century. The Fabians, in their belief in the 'power of the "idea,"' belonged not to the philistine tradition as most commonly assumed, but this longer, cultural tradition.

[43] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 130.

Part 1 Negotiating 'Fabianism'

1 The Fabian Society, 1884-1914

In his revisionist essay 'The Fabians Reconsidered,' published in *Labouring Men* (1964), Eric Hobsbawm argued that members and historians of the Fabian Society overplayed its significance in twentieth-century British society and politics. He predicated this argument on an analysis both of the 'social composition' of the Society in its founding decades, and of its relation to the established 'streams' of British politics.[1] 'Essentially a body of intellectuals,' the early Society benefited from the propagandistic skill of its predominantly professional, middle-class members: proficient at 'blow[ing] their own trumpet,' the Fabians effectively wrote themselves into British labour history as the progenitors of the welfare state. When it came to their actual politics, however, Hobsbawm contended that the founding Fabians were 'out of *rapport*' not only 'with the rest of the left' and the 'workers,' but with the Liberal and Conservative Parties. They were ideological 'anomalies,' existing nowhere on the British political spectrum. Fabian history, he concluded, ought be treated as an 'accidental' part of British socialist history.

As a preeminent historian of the British Marxist tradition, Hobsbawm wrote from a committed historiographical, as well as ideological, position. In a late lecture delivered to a British Academy Colloquium in November 2004, he prefaced his defence of Marxist historiography with Karl Marx's famous maxim, 'the philosophers so far have only interpreted the world: the point is to change it.'[2] Hobsbawm's evaluation of the Fabian Society was imbued not only with this way of thinking about how (not) to write about 'the world,' but also with certain presuppositions about how socialists ought to attempt to 'change it.' On this latter account, the Fabians—anomalous, elitist, recondite—failed.

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[1] 'The Fabians Reconsidered,' in Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, 250-71 (50-56).
[2] Eric Hobsbawm, *Marxist Historiography*, *British Academy Colloquium on Marxist Historiography* (http://britac.studyserve.com/home/: British Academy, 13 November 2004), Audio recording of lecture. Accessed 19 May 2014.

The difficulty of this approach is that the founding Fabians never committed themselves to a doctrine, Marxist or otherwise, and deliberately positioned the Society outside the field of practical politics. Ideological agnosticism was a principle the Society carried into the twentieth century: as the Fabian historian and political theorist G. D. H. Cole wrote in 1942, 'the Fabian Society, I am glad to say, has no orthodoxy.'[3] The fraught nature of the autonomous space the Fabians attempted to occupy, however, proved to be a recurrent difficulty that they had to negotiate time and again during the Society's founding years, and came to shape its reception by contemporaries and subsequent historians.

We can profitably reconsider Hobsbawm's 'reconsideration' by bringing the methods of 'cultural history' to bear on the 'sociology'—in the Durkheimean sense of 'sociology' as 'the science of institutions, their genesis, and their functioning'—of the early Fabian Society.[4] As the collected essays in *The New Cultural History* (1989) show, the 'accent,' in editor Lynn Hunt's words, of this field has increasingly shifted towards the 'close examination—of texts, of pictures, and of actions—and [an] open-mindedness to what those examinations will reveal.'[5] We might extend the purview of that 'close examination,' as T. G. Ashplant and other cultural historians of an anthropological bent have done more recently, to social practices, identities, and institutions.[6] This methodological reorientation encourages us to be 'open-minded' about the early Fabian Society, and its relation to British history, political, economic, social, and intellectual. Taking this perspective, we might ask: what principles did the early Society promote, how did it embed these ideas within the institution itself, and how might this approach

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[3] G. D. H. Cole, *Fabian Socialism* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1971), vi.
[4] Preface to the second edition, Emile Durkheim and Steven Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 46.
[5] Hunt, *The New Cultural History*, 22.
[6] Ashplant and Smyth, *Explorations in Cultural History*, 4-6 (5).

tell us something new, *vis-à-vis* Marxist historiography, about the Society and its reception? In this chapter, I argue that by taking 'Fabianism' out of political and economic history, and evaluating it within cultural history, we can recover a more nuanced understanding of what they and their contemporaries saw the Society as doing, and of the symbolic strategies they used to position themselves as autonomous observers of politics, culture, and, society.

A preliminary question to ask of the genesis of the Society, and one which will help raise the level of our understanding of its subsequent organisation and 'functioning' in the context of modernity, politics, and culture in England, is why the small group of young men and women who broke from the Fellowship of the New Life late in 1883 chose the name 'Fabian' for their fledgling society?

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As with so many histories, it is necessary first to look beyond the event of interest to an earlier moment in time. In the autumn of 1883, the Scottish philosopher Thomas Davidson moved to London to find a like-minded community receptive to his ideas of the 'Vita Nuova.' Davidson not only believed in the perfectibility of humanity, but that the pursuit of individual perfection would lead to a fairer, democratic society. Together with his disciples Frank Podmore, a passionate spiritualist and graduate of Oxford, and Percival Chubb, a fellow psychical enthusiast and civil servant, Davidson formed the Fellowship of the New Life with a view to incorporating and disseminating these values among London's progressive circles.

The Fellowship was more formal than a dining club or social circle, holding its first meeting in Edward Pease's rooms on Osnaburgh Street on 24 October 1883. The minutes of this inaugural meeting record the founding members' resolution on the purpose of the Fellowship, namely, 'that an association be formed whose ultimate aim

shall be the reconstruction of society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities.'[7] On 7 December, its members—who by this stage included Havelock Ellis, Hubert Bland, H. H. Champion, and William Clarke—resolved on a three-fold mission:

> *Object.*—The cultivation of a perfect character in one and all.
>
> *Principle.*—The subordination of material things to spiritual.
>
> *Fellowship.*—The sole and essential condition of fellowship shall be a single-minded, sincere, and strenuous devotion to the object and principle.[8]

Thus committed to writing, however, the 'object' and 'principle' of the Fellowship made stark previously latent divergences of opinion and ambition held by individual members. Some—the majority, it turned out—were dissatisfied with this spiritualist, non-rational, if 'sincere,' approach to reconstructing society through the pursuit of individual 'perfection' and moral regeneration. This moment of inscription marked the inception of the Fabian Society and, ultimately, the foreclosure of the Fellowship.

At the Fellowship's first meeting of the New Year, on 4 January 1884, members resolved by a large majority to form a new group that was to 'be called the Fabian Society (as Mr Podmore explained in allusion to the victorious policy of Fabius Cunctator).'[9] The splinter group, committed at this stage only to the Fellowship's ambition 'that Society must be reconstructed in such a manner as to secure the general welfare and happiness,' was already sufficiently conceptualised that its founders could outline three, 'practical measures' to bring this resolution to fruition:

(a) Hold meetings for discussion, the reading of papers, hearing of reports, etc.
(b) Delegate some of its members to attend meetings held on social subjects, debates at Workmen's clubs, etc., in order that such members may in the first place report to the Society on the proceedings, and in the second place put forward, as occasion serves, the views of the Society.
(c) Take measures in other ways, as, for example, by the collection of articles from current literature, to obtain information on all contemporary social movements and social needs.

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[7] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 32-33.
[8] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 32.
[9] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 34.

These 'practical measures,' discussed more fully below, confirmed the Society's departure from New Life spiritualism. Rather than cultivating individual 'perfection' and 'fellowship,' emphasis fell on information collation and dissemination, discussion, and advocacy. These inherently literate measures came to be reflected in the Society's methods, distinguishing it from contemporary political reform groups. The Fabian Society, in name and mission, was thus committed to paper for the first time.

The choice of 'Fabian' for the splinter society's name was intended as a direct 'allusion,' as Pease reported, 'to the victorious policy of Fabius Cunctator.' Although Podmore had had to 'explain' the 'allusion' to the members gathered in Pease's rooms in January 1884, Pease himself was confident, judging by the absence of explanatory gloss in his official *History of the Fabian Society* (1916), that readers required no further introduction to the 'victorious policy' of the Roman General. He could rely, that is, on the classical education of his implied readership.

The Greek historian Plutarch ensured the longevity of the legend of Fabius Maximus with his rendition of the story in *Lives,* a classical text familiar to any Englishman educated in England's public schools and ancient universities. According to Plutarch's biography, Fabius—endowed with 'a becoming Gravity' and 'a Consummate Prudence,' and 'trained […] in the Art of speaking and persuading'—earned distinction amongst the Roman allies for refusing to engage Hannibal's Heavens-favoured forces in open battle during the Second Punic War (218-201 BCE).[10] Fabius's genius, as Plutarch recounted, consisted in recognising that, 'if let alone, watch'd and observ'd, the neighbouring Garisons in the mean time being well secur'd, and the Roman Allies defended,' his enemies' 'Vigour would soon expire, like a Flame for want of Aliment.'

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[10] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives in eight volumes. Translated from the Greek. To which is prefixed, the life of Plutarch written by Mr. Dryden* (London: J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper in the Strand., 1749) 2:159-60

Through translations and editions—John Dryden's translation (1683-6) and Arthur Clough's revised edition were printed repeatedly throughout the nineteenth century—Plutarch's *Lives* ensured that the legend of the Roman 'Cunctator' was embedded in the Victorian, elite cultural idiom. As one writer to the editor of the *Times* warned in 1852, with evident desire to show his (we may assume) own classical literacy, 'Fabius Cunctator was worshipped by a grateful posterity, but his contemporaries did not appreciate him fully.'[11] The English noun 'cunctation,' or the action of delaying—we think of Thomas Carlyle's 'three years' sad cunctation' after the death of his wife Jane Welsh—and its cognates testify to the absorption of this legend within the English idiom.[12]

While the metonymy 'Fabian' was a cultural doxa recognisable to the educated, English public throughout the nineteenth century, it was not always evoked in specific reference to the classical context. Particularly for the first and second English generations responding to the violence and upheaval of France's revolutionary crises, the idea of the 'Fabian policy' came to signify a comparatively modern, English approach to warfare abroad and political change at home. 'Wait, wait, wait,' recommended one *Times* observer relating to readers Alphonse Lamartine's efforts to establish the Second Republic in 1848, the 'Fabian policy is best with revolutions. Be patient for a day, and to-morrow will resolve the enigma.'[13] It also appeared in commentaries specifically on British Home politics during this period, signifying both the positive and negative sense of delaying or deferring political action or legislative change. During the 'Irish Agitations' in the late 1830s and early 1840s, for instance, English commentators remarked

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[11] T, 'Letter to the Editor: The Government and the Militia,' *The Times*, no. 21099 (26 April 1852), 5.
[12] Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences* (London: Longmans, Green, 1881 http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/300022254.pdf doi:http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/300022254.pdf) 2:69 8 May 2014. Scanned first edition
[13] 'London, Monday, May 1, 1848,' *The Times*, no. 19851 (1 May 1848), 4.

repeatedly on Sir Robert Peel's 'Fabian tactics of delay,' as one *Examiner* reviewer phrased it.[14]

The founders of the Fellowship splinter group recognised in these classical resonances and strategic connotations metaphors for their 'practical' plan for gradual social reconstruction. This alignment is made more striking by the conspicuous absence of references to 'socialism' in the Society's earliest documents. The early 1880s, when the 'Fabians' were coming into being, was a period of heightened interest in social, economic, and political reform, known as the British socialist revival. The American political economist Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* (1879) became a core text for late-Victorian reformers across the spectrum, had toured England in 1882; Karl Marx died in London in March 1883, prompting a flurry of obituaries and increased visibility in the public eye; and various organisations dedicated to socialist reform were flourishing, with the rapid succession of the establishment of Henry Hyndman's Democratic Federation (1881), relaunched as the Social Democratic Federation (1884), William Morris' splinter group, the Socialist League (1884), and the Socialist Union (1886), for instance. Viewed in this context, the founding Fabians' decision to eschew more overtly politicised coordinates and the orthodoxies of nineteenth-century socialism in favour of cultivating the association with a military strategy of gradualism and delay, and a classical inheritance embedded in Victorian elite culture, signalled their intention to occupy a unique, we might say 'anomalous,' niche in the burgeoning reform movement.

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When, in that inaugural meeting in 1884, Frank Podmore proposed 'Fabian' as the name for the 'practical' offshoot from the humanist Fellowship of the New Life, therefore, the

[14] 'The Tories are Not Ready for Office,' *Examiner*, no. 1553 (1837), 705.

new Society inherited not only the association with the classical legend of Fabius Maximus but also the elite Victorian tradition in which 'Fabian' signalled a military and political 'policy' or a 'tactic' synonymous, for better and worse, with 'the dignity of doing nothing,' and the 'success of reserve.'[15] It would be expected, therefore, that the Society's founding documents—the Basis, which members were asked to ratify, the early manifestos and tracts, and the meeting minutes themselves—would reflect this strategic emphasis.

The most obvious reiteration of the Society's association with the classical tradition is found in an inscription printed on the cover of the first Fabian tract, entitled 'Why Are the Many Poor?' (1884). This inscription paraphrased the legend of Fabius as told by Plutarch:

> 'For the right moment you must wait, as FABIUS did most patiently, when warring against HANNIBAL, though many censured his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as FABIUS did, or your waiting will be in vain, and fruitless.'[16]

The use of inverted commas and the stylised language of the inscription both served to imply it was an excerpt from a classical source, plausibly *Lives*. Subsequent tracts that also included a title-page epigraph followed this convention, as in tracts two and three, which included quotations from the American politician and poet John Hay, and the English Liberal M.P. George W. E. Russell respectively. Unlike these later quotations, however, the authenticity of the 'Fabian' epigraph was, as H. G. Wells observed, dubious. 'The interesting thing to remark,' Wells wrote of the inscription in 1906:

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[15] 'Fabian Policy, or Faineant Policy,' *Fun* 6(2 April 1864), 28.
[16] W. L. Philips, *Why Are the Many Poor?* , vol. 1, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, 1884).

> is not that this passage is a fabrication, but that it is untrue; when the time came, as you may see for yourself in Plutarch's Lives, Fabius did *not* strike hard. This waiting game, wise no doubt its adoption was in the beginning, became at last an enervating habit of limited action.[17]

Wells used the contestability of the allusion as an opportunity to recommend an alternative vision and method for the Society, one that was the inverse of its actual organisation: he campaigned for it to become popular, active, direct. Pease touched on the dubious authenticity in his *History*, noting that although Frank Podmore suggested the 'motto' as it stood, a printed source is 'not to be discovered in any history.'[18] Regardless, Pease asserted, the 'meaning' of the 'motto' from the official Fabian perspective 'is clear': 'the delay was to be for the purpose of "taking counsel."' While A. M. McBriar has used this context to argue that the Fabians were more Marxist than is commonly accepted—that while 'the "Fabian" tactic at this stage was for the purpose of taking counsel, discussing, working out their views,' it was not to the exclusion of 'striking hard' if the necessity arose—the fact that the motto is a 'fabrication' that departed in this aspect from Roman history actually strengthens the argument that the founders sought to associate the Society and its method of counsel-through-cunctation, with the 'Fabian tactics' of 'Prudent' delay and persuasion.[19]

Whatever the origin of the inscription, the consonance between 'Fabian tactics,' both as recorded in Plutarch's *Lives* and as signified throughout the nineteenth century, and the tactics employed by the Fabian Society after 1884 was more than nominal. Despite his scepticism, Wells himself recognised the analogy between the Roman and the English circumstances: as Fabius had 'gather[ed] and husband[ed] strength for Rome,' so too would the Fabians 'gather' allies wherever they could, and 'husband

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[17] H. G. Wells, 'Faults of the Fabian,' in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, ed. Samuel Hynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 401-2.
[18] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 39-40.
[19] McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics*, 9.

strength' for their views through subtle and indirect methods. 'So Fabius became our godfather,' he wrote, 'and the waiting game our method.'[20]

Increasingly, this 'waiting game' came to be known as the quintessential Fabian strategy of 'permeation.' First found in Hubert Bland's contribution to the *Essays in Fabian Socialism* (1889), 'permeation' in essence speaks to a wide variety of strategies motivated by the conviction that gradual constitutional change was the surest guarantee of meaningful social reform in England.[21] Margaret Cole proposed the metaphor 'honeycombing' to convey the sense of 'converting either to Socialism or to parts of the immediate Fabian programme, as set out in the continuous stream of Tracts and lectures, key persons, or groups of persons, who were in a position either to take action themselves, or to influence others.'[22] While Cole's analogy is not applicable to the Fabians' frequently overlooked efforts to convert the English public to socialism, it does convey the relation between Fabian 'weapons' ('Tracts and lectures'), targets ('persons, or groups of persons' of influence), and outcomes (conversion to 'Socialism').

'Permeation' figured in the modern British reform movement as an alternative to the violent or revolutionary tactics promoted by more radical organisations. As Bernard Shaw wrote in his 'Report on Fabian Policy' (1896), the Society 'sympathizes' with the 'English people' who desired 'gradual, peaceful changes, as against revolution, conflict with the army and police, and martyrdom.'[23] Physical protest, violent agitation, or the overthrow of government were not, as they were for more radical, contemporary reform groups such as the Women's Social and Political Union suffragettes or Charlotte Wilson's London Anarchists, apposite to the moderate desire for 'peaceful changes.'

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[20] Wells, 'Faults of the Fabian,' 401-2.
[21] Hubert Bland, 'The Outlook,' in Bernard Shaw, *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, Jubilee ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948 [1889]), 214-5.
[22] Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism*, Kingswood books on social history (London: Heinemann, 1961), 85.
[23] Bernard Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy* vol. 70, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, July 1896), 4.

In practice, the 'special variety of permeating work' was multifarious, including various more or less indirect tactics for spreading socialistic views across what Shaw called the 'Estates of the realm.'[24] Specific strategies ranged from converting party leaders from across the political spectrum to socialistic perspectives on specific 'social subjects' through debates, tracts, and private conversations; installing Fabian members in positions of influence within the press, political parties, and other socialist and non-socialist organisations; and generally generating sympathy for the Fabian programme among the English public through open lectures and articles in the periodical press.[25]

By the early 1890s, the Fabians claimed wide-reaching victory through the practice of 'permeation.' Shaw boasted in the 1890s that the Fabians had already 'permeated the party organisations and pulled all the wires we could lay our hands on with our utmost adroitness and energy.'[26] Shaw reclaimed here the metaphor of 'wire pulling,' a commonplace in the early discourse of 'Fabianism' describing the indirect methods or subterfuge of Fabians in British political life. Early successes of Fabian 'wire pulling' included 'collaring the Star,' T. P. O'Connor's half-penny evening newspaper, by installing the Fabian H. W. Massingham as assistant editor in 1893; the election of various Fabians as Progressives on the London County Council; and the 'permeation of the Liberal party' through converting more radical members to the Fabian programme. The use of indirect methods over direct confrontation—of, in effect, evolution over revolution—show the strength of the analogy the Fabians sought to convey.

Mark Bevir has recently argued it is a mistake, which he suggested many historians have made, to treat 'permeation,' as with the metonymy 'Fabianism' itself, as a

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[24] Bernard Shaw, *The Fabian Society: Its Early History*, vol. 41, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, [1892] 1899), 24.
[25] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 19-20.
[26] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 19.

'monolithic' or stable strategy.[27] Instead, he proposes two main 'variations' of 'permeation': Sidney Webb's 'top-down' infiltration of England's policy makers, on the one hand, and Bernard Shaw's conversion of the radicals in the Liberal Party on the other. We can appreciate Bevir's critique of the single-story of 'permeation' without necessarily following the Shavian/Webbian dualism he asserts in its place. Rather, it is profitable to treat 'permeation' as a suite of strategies designed to facilitate the Society's aim in relation to specific audiences: on the one hand, those inside the field of practical politics, including politicians, civil servants, and policy makers; on the other, the broader English public. As developed more fully below, the advantage of treating 'permeation' in terms of audiences rather than practitioners is that it recognises the distinction between intended audiences for 'permeation,' and the specific 'permeative strategies' deployed. In other words, while Shaw sought to 'permeate' the Liberal Party by converting its radical members to the Fabian, parliamentary programme through policy tracts and debates, and while Webb used similar strategies in his efforts to woo policy makers on specific questions of policy, a different set of strategies was necessary for the more general conversion of the 'respectable' English public to socialistic ways of thinking. Before I address this more closely, however, I turn first to a consideration of the social status of the Society, its organising principles, structure, and 'functioning' in the cultural and political fields of turn-of-the-century England.

'The Mission of the Fabians'

In an 1896 tract, Bernard Shaw stated that 'the mission of the Fabians' was to 'persuade the English people to make their political constitution thoroughly democratic,' and to 'socialize their industries as to make the livelihood of the people entirely independent of

[27] Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, 196-8.

private Capitalism.'[28] Persuasion, and not the overthrow of government, was the key to spreading socialism. As the Fabians gained public recognition, contemporaries confronted by the difficulties in categorising the Society began to question whether the Fabians were 'justified in calling themselves Socialists at all.'[29] The fraught nature of autonomy that was so central to the Society's self-understanding was the root of the difficulty. Hobsbawm's opening pronouncement on the founding Fabians' 'remarkable a-typicality' was itself a recapitulation of an established Marxist response to this characteristic. His assertion, more specifically, that the founding Fabians, who were neither 'liberal' nor 'working-class,' and certainly neither Marxist nor Conservative, had 'no place in the British political tradition,' is a recurrent one in the Marxist school.[30] We saw in the Introduction this assumption of 'a-typicality' in Trotsky and Thompson's own characterisations of, and objections to, 'Fabianism.' Each of these Marxist historians construed their objection to Fabian socialism in terms of the Society's relation, or absence thereof, to the 'British political tradition.' Lacking a conceptual or ideological basis in international (read, Marxist) socialism, Fabian literature ignored the logic of the political system while pursuing its own intrinsic justification.

When considered from the joint perspectives of institutional and intellectual history, however, the question of how the early Fabians did, or attempted to, relate the Society to the 'British political tradition' yields a different characterisation. Such a method does not measure the Fabian Society and its literature against a Marxist norm, but instead opens up 'Fabianism' as a topic of critical inquiry, the significance of which varied over time and place. Pierre Bourdieu's critique of the Marxist method is useful here as it offers a corrective to the '"short-circuit" effect' risked when 'Fabianism,' as an

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[28] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 3.
[29] John Beattie Crozier, 'A Challenge to Socialism, III. The Fabians and Parliamentarians,' *Fortnightly Review* 83, no. 497 (May 1908), 803-16 (803).
[30] Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, 252.

artefact, is treated as a reflection of 'external determinants' like 'political revolutions' or 'economic crises.'[31] In their efforts to establish themselves outside the 'field' of politics, the early Fabians had to negotiate the Society's social status and authority with other socialist groups and individuals also vying for the right to adjudicate questions of general interest before the public. This focus on 'specific interests' rather than 'external determinants' helps us avoid making value judgements about the success or 'failure,' with Hobsbawm, of the Society as a socialist group, and appreciate instead their 'struggle' to mediate autonomy—freedom from political doctrine and power politics—on the one hand, with the authority to comment on political questions on the other.

To begin with, proceeding from Hobsbawm's complaint about the ideological 'a-typicality' of the Society in relation to the 'British political tradition,' it is important to note that the Fabians never claimed to operate within the field of practical politics. Indeed, they consistently insisted to the contrary. 'In the early days,' as Pease wrote, the Fabians drew 'a clear line between Socialism and politics.'[32] In other words, repudiating 'political sectarianism,' the Fabians believed that their work *qua* socialists lay of necessity outside, or above, partisan alignments.[33] In his opening gambit outlining the purpose of the Fabian Society, Bernard Shaw spoke to this condition of the Fabian constitution:

> [The Fabian Society] brings all the pressure and persuasion in its power to bear on existing forces, caring nothing by what name any party calls itself, or what principles, Socialist or other, it professes, but having regard solely to the tendency of its actions, supporting those which make for Socialism and Democracy, and opposing those which are reactionary.[34]

And again, later in the tract, the Fabian Society 'does not claim to be the people of England, or even the Socialist party, and therefore does not seek direct political

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[31] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 181.
[32] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 28.
[33] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 11.
[34] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 3.

representation by putting forward Fabian candidates at elections.'[35] In such statements, Shaw communicated the Fabians' interest in asserting independence from existing 'parties' and 'principles' in its pursuit of spreading 'Socialism and Democracy' in England. It is not, emphatically, a political party, nor indeed did it subscribe to a political doctrine.

If the Fabians did not operate within the field of organised politics, nor did they belong to the Marxist tradition. The two clauses of this observation are related. The Fabians' specific disavowal of Marxism, that is to say, was part of a broader repudiation of all political orthodoxy. Recurrent phrases in their founding documents testify to this repudiation in its various aspects: 'Fabian Toleration,' 'Fabian freedom of thought and speech,' and 'Fabian Compromise,' for instance, each speak to the Fabians' rejection of doctrinal logic and partisan territorialism. We can look once again to the 1896 'Report on Fabian Policy' for an official elucidation of this point:

> The Fabian Society strenuously maintains its freedom of thought and speech with regard to the errors of Socialist authors, economists, leaders, and parties, no less than to those of its opponents. For instance, it insists on the necessity of maintaining as critical an attitude towards Marx and Lassalle, some of whose views must by this time be discarded as erroneous or obsolete, as these eminent Socialists themselves maintained towards their predecessors, St. Simon and Robert Owen.[36]

Underlying the Fabians' self-understanding, therefore, is a repeated preference for liberal values over socialist—Marxist—affiliation. 'Freedom of thought and speech' was a precondition of the Fabian tactic of 'permeation,' because it enabled the Fabians to join other organisations and parties, and to articulate solutions to modern problems free from the necessity of conforming to established doctrine. While it was a common feature of the British reform movement at the turn of the century for individuals to hold multiple affiliations of socialist, anarchist, suffragist, and other radical organisations—of

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[35] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 3.
[36] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 6.

the SDF, the Theosophist Society, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Women's Franchise League, the National Secular Society, and so forth—the Fabian Society took this principle to extremes. Members were encouraged 'to join all other organisations, Socialist or non-Socialist,' whatever their 'name' or 'principles,' with a view to 'permeating them with Fabian ideas as far as possible.'[37] In practice, as John McLaren remarked in 1906 of the Fabian socialists elected to Parliament as Liberals, this meant they 'might also have entered Parliament as Tories or Social Democrats or Independents.'[38]

Further doubts about the Fabians' political coordinates arose from the fact that in its earliest months, the Society was notably vague on many questions of doctrine and reform, such as the 'money question' (whether or not the socialist state ought to have a currency), the boundaries between socialism and anarchism, and the direction and principles of 'continental socialism.' Even in the mid-1890s, the Society publicly claimed to have 'no distinctive opinions on the Marriage Question, Religion, Art, abstract Economics, historic Evolution, Currency, or any subject other than its own special business of practical Democracy and Socialism,' because these lay 'outside' socialism.[39] Shaw remarked on this feature of the Society when he, then a twenty-eight year old aspiring novelist, was investigating London's socialist scene:

> When I myself, on the point of joining the Social Democratic Federation, changed my mind and joined instead the Fabian Society, I was guided by no discoverable difference in program or principles, but solely by an instinctive feeling that the Fabian and not the Federation would attract men of my own bias and intellectual habits who were then ripening for the work that lay before us.[40]

What the young Shaw did detect when he fronted up to 'the Fabian,' in-house slang for the London Society, was a tangible 'difference' in the type of reformer drawn to the

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[37] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 4.
[38] John McLaren, 'Labour Parties: the new element in parliamentary life,' *Fortnightly Review* 79, no. 470 (February 1906), 368-75 (370).
[39] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 3.
[40] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 4.

Society as opposed to other reform organisations. The early Fabians 'were then middle-class all through, rank and file as well as leaders,' while the SDF and the League were 'quite proletarian in their rank and file.'[41] Gradually, this 'instinctive' preference for intellectual discussion over revolutionary agitation was perpetuated in the way the Society conducted its business. By holding their meetings 'in one another's drawing rooms,' the founding Fabians 'undoubtedly prevented working-men from joining the Fabian.'[42] What began, then, as an incidental feature of Fabian demographics became a conscious characteristic perpetuated through its organisational structures. As Marxist historians and commentators further to the left have pointed out, the Fabian Society was not a 'working-class' organisation, either by subscription or by orientation. To dispel any doubts, Shaw clarified: 'we have never advanced the smallest pretension to represent the working-classes of this country.'[43] This kind of definition-by-negation—what the Society did not do—calls into question the conceptual legitimacy of Marxist denunciations of the Fabians' failure to live up to a principle that the Society never in fact endorsed, and invites closer consideration of what the Society *did* in fact advance as its cause.

The connotations of the nineteenth-century Fabian allusion provide a key for understanding the Society's seemingly paradoxical stance as a socialist group that did not 'represent the working-classes' of England. There was a conceptual link, that is, between the Society's structural organisation and its 'Fabian tactic' of 'permeation.' A clue to this link is found in Pease's analysis of the early Fabians' relationship to the provincial societies that began springing up across England in the 1890s. Of this relationship, Pease claimed that the founding Fabians:

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[41] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 23.
[42] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 4.
[43] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 23.

> always recognised that the peculiar political methods of the London Society, appropriate to a body of highly educated people, nearly all of them speakers, writers, or active political workers, were unsuitable for the groups of earnest workmen in the provinces who were influenced by our teaching.[44]

The idea of 'suitability' was therefore embedded within the Fabian identity with evident consequences for the professional and educational qualifications of members. Pease's rhetoric contains the sense of 'us'—the select, London 'body' with requisite cultural capital—and 'them'—the less organised, provincial 'groups' that benefited from central Fabian 'teaching.' McClaren, a 'working man' and secretary of one of these provincial societies, corroborated this conceptual link when he advised readers of the *Fortnightly Review* that 'the bulk of workers are lacking in the training essential to Fabian work.' Discussed more fully below, this 'work' was primarily literate, consisting of 'lectures,' publishing 'articles in the Press,' and working for 'one or other of the many committees' that made up the Society's structure.[45] To influence policy makers, infiltrate editorial boards, and convert members of parliament and the public to socialist thought—to 'permeate'—demanded both a certain level of literacy (they were 'speakers, writers, [and] active political workers') and proximity to the physical premises of these centres of power, such as Westminster, newspaper offices, and the many clubs and assembly rooms where lectures, debates, and meetings were held in London.

Resisting Classification: A Balance Between Centralisation and Freedom

While it did not seek political capital in the form of electoral gain or 'direct representation,' the Society explicitly did aim to influence those within the field of practical politics. In a sense, it operated in the wings of Westminster, keeping, as Melvyn Bragg wrote in his preface to a tract reprint, 'an informal and watching brief on the

[44] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 102.
[45] McLaren, 'Labour Parties,' 369.

legislators and leaders of society' while not actively participating in parliamentary life.[46] Simultaneously, however, the Fabians did seek to influence the English public. In attempting to balance incorporation, with its demands of membership and a mandate, on the one hand, with autonomy from the political field and the liberal desire to think beyond the limits of socialist traditions, on the other, the Society came to occupy a space somewhere between a 'very modern' institution, the 'think-tank,' and a characteristically Victorian one, the gentleman's club.[47]

Hartwig Pautz recently defined 'think-tanks' as institutions 'in the business of producing and advocating ideas with the objective of influencing politicians, civil servants, and the general public so that politics and policies develop in particular directions.'[48] Inherently liminal, think-tanks exist 'somewhere in the spaces between government, business and academia.'[49] In its official literature today, the Fabian Society promotes itself as 'Britain's oldest political think-tank,' and unproblematically meets Pautz's institutional definition.[50] Through reports, campaigns, seminars, and conferences, the Society seeks to influence 'political and public thinking,' according to its official website, on questions of welfare, the structures of 'power, wealth and opportunity,' and questions of democracy in the modern world more generally.

Many of the distinguishing features of the Society today were inherited from its original organisation. These features include not only the mission—the shaping of public and political thinking—but more particularly the structures of organisation. The Society's governance structure, for instance, adopted from the very first meeting in 1884

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[46] Bernard Shaw, *The Fabian Society: Its Early History, with a preface by Melvyn Bragg*, 2nd ed., vol. 41, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, 1984 [1899]), i.
[47] Hartwig Pautz, *Think-Tanks, Social Democracy, and Social Policy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 http://www.palgraveconnect.com/doifinder/10.1057/9780230368545) 1 14 February 2014. Electronic book
[48] Pautz, *Think-Tanks, Social Democracy, and Social Policy*, See in particular 'Why Study Think-Tanks?,' 1-7 (1).
[49] Pautz, *Think-Tanks, Social Democracy, and Social Policy*, 1.
[50] 'The Fabian Society,' http://www.fabians.org.uk/about/. 10 May 2014. Accessed 14 May 2014.

to conduct Fabian business remains in place. This structure comprises an Executive Committee of annually elected officers, and a network of auxiliary committees—including permanent committees, such as those for Publication and Finance, and working committees, such as the Special Committee convened on 12 April 1907 to investigate H. G. Wells's recommendations for changes to the 'Basis'—which reported to the Executive on administrative and *ad hoc* business.[51] Meetings for all committees observed due procedure, governed by rotating chair, with an agenda and minutes. This structure was vital to the Society's work, both educational, and literary: Bernard Shaw advised Wells in 1906 that if he truly desired to commandeer 'the Fabian,' he had better acquire 'the committee habit' because it was through this system of governance that the Society executed its business.[52] While this committee structure was familiar to London's gentlemen's clubs and private societies, the early Fabian Society's dedication to social reform, and the allocation of resources to the business of the Society (and not, as with London's gentlemen's clubs, to dining, livery, servants, premises maintenance and so forth) resembled a professional advocacy body more akin to a think-tank than a private club.

As an advocacy body, the Society attracted a specific membership qualified to conduct the 'special work,' with McLaren, of lecturing, debating, and committee service. In his own study of the 'social composition' of the Society, Hobsbawm showed that in 1892 the London Society had a membership of 626, of whom the majority were 'journalists and writers,' 'clergy,' 'teachers,' 'self-made civil servants,' and 'professionals' associated with the universities.[53] This social condition may be contrasted to the popular

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[51] Fabian Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, Fabian Society Online Archive, Fabian Society/C/1-C/22, C10, 12 April 1907, 62-3.
[52] Bernard Shaw to H. G. Wells, 14 September 1906, Bernard Shaw, *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, 4 vols. (London: Reinhardt, 1965), (1898-1910): 651.
[53] Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, 250-71 (52).

reform movement, which negotiated change from a position of mass support. In the mid-1890s, for instance, the branches of the SDF had a combined membership of more than 10,000.[54] Further, Emmeline Pankhurst's increasingly militant Women's Social and Political Union, founded in October 1903, campaigned for women's suffrage through mass demonstrations in public parks and deputations to Westminster. 'Fabian tactics' were anathema to the WSPU, whose motto, 'Deeds, Not Words,' was practically an inversion of the Fabian motto, 'Light, not Heat.'

A further institutional condition of the Fabian Society was the 'Basis of the Fabian Society,' which candidates were required to affirm. A 250-word document striking for its brevity and its non-doctrinal tone, the 'Basis' opens with the statement, 'the Fabian Society consists of Socialists.'[55] It aimed therefore at 'the re-organisation of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit.' To attain this aim, the Society 'looks to the spread of Socialist opinions,' and 'the general dissemination of knowledge as to the relation between the individual and Society in its economic, ethical, and political aspects.' Though the wording may differ, the principle is consonant with the Society's basic mission today. The only specific action to which the Basis committed members was 'to take part according to their abilities and opportunities in the general work of the Society,' and 'to contribute annually to the Society's funds.' As a document of affiliation, the 'Basis' is remarkable for the minimal demands it places on members, and accounts for the many Liberals, Labour representatives, anarchists, and even Tories—if Wells's assessment of Hubert Bland's political affiliation is given credence—on the early Society's membership lists.

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[54] Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, 45-7.
[55] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 15.

Despite Wells's best efforts to the overhaul the 'Basis,' the only pre-war alteration came late in 1906, when Magdalen 'Maud' Pember Reeves successfully moved that the wording be revised to include an affirmation of equal citizenship for women. This revision brought the 'Basis' into line with the Society's relatively modern stance on women's participation.[56] Unlike most of London's private clubs, many of which became 'aware' of the women's movement only after 1914, the Fabian Society actively invited full female participation from its inaugural meeting.[57] Female members contributed equally to the work of the Society as outlined in the Basis. They enjoyed open access to and status on the Executive; chaired Executive meetings; convened sub-committees; drafted and edited pamphlets; and lectured on behalf of the Society, with Annie Besant and Edith Nesbit two prominent examples. The Society's anti-revolutionary, specifically 'Fabian' tactics facilitated this equal participation: whereas women in the SDF were seen as a hindrance to, for instance, strike action, there were no intellectual or structural barriers for (educated) women drafting tracts or lecturing on behalf of the Society.[58] Beatrice Webb, Emma Brooke, Charlotte Wilson, and Emily Townsend are among the Fabian women who contributed to the tract series and lecturing work of the Society.

Whatever the consonances between governance and function, however, it would be anachronistic to describe the early Society as a 'think-tank.' As an organisational and institutional model, the 'think-tank' emerged as such only after the Second World War, and in its earliest sense was largely associated with the American context. In 1962, the *New York Times* presumed the term was not widely known among readers when it

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[56] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C10, 7 December 1906, 28.
[57] Amy Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: a cultural history of gender and class in late Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 159.
[58] Martin Crick, *The History of the Social-Democratic Federation* (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, Keele University Press, 1994), 227.

reported that Robert Kennedy had been seen stepping 'out of a "Think Tank" meeting.'[59] Even in 2005, the British *Independent* newspaper, economically liberal and politically centrist, queried why 'American-style think-tanks bother setting up in this country at all when governments (and oppositions) are so reluctant to embrace really new ideas.' The present-day Fabians' claim to belong to the 'oldest think-tank' notwithstanding, the founding Fabians did not have recourse to this classification.

In many respects, as seen in the Victorian elite culture heralded by the classical allusion by which the Society announced itself, the early Fabian Society resembled a modern 'think-tank' less than it did an exclusive, gentlemen's club. If London in the 1880s witnessed the proliferation of social, political, and economic reform organisations, so too did it see a comparable flourishing of 'clubland.' As Anthony Lejeune observed, 'the history of London clubs, pieced together from old memoirs, membership lists, and betting books, and from the often enigmatic records of committee meetings, constitutes a social history of the English upper class during the past 250 years.'[60] More recently defined by cultural historians as a complex, imagined identity as well as a network of physical locations, 'clubland' embodied Victorian values of class and gender, exclusivity and social status.[61] Membership of one of London's many gentlemen's clubs, characterised by diverse political affiliations and cultural perspectives, conferred prestige, and was accordingly policed through various checks and measures. These were both institutional and cultural, ranging from subscription fees and matriculation through Oxbridge, to the less quantifiable but equally important recognition as belonging to the right 'set' by association, profession, or wealth. Founders of the elite Athenaeum Club, for instance, with its grand premises at 107 Pall Mall, resolved on 1

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[59] "think-tank, n.", Oxford English Dictionary Oxford University Press, Online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/200809 .
[60] Anthony Lejeune, *The Gentlemen's Clubs of London* (London: Parkgate Books, 1984), 11.
[61] Milne-Smith, *London Clubland*, 1-10.

March 1824 that 'persons eligible to the club shall be individuals known for their scientific and literary attainments, Artists of eminence in any of the Fine Arts and Noblemen and Gentlemen distinguished as liberal patrons of Science, Literature or the Arts.' The founding 'Rules of the Club' appointed trustees, a general committee, and election guidelines.[62]

While it never boasted the fine premises, servants, or the luxurious trappings of London's elite clubs, the Fabian Society's adoption of comparable institutional and cultural barriers to membership, and affirmations of exclusivity, aligns it more closely with the Pall Mall or St. James gentlemen's club rather than any of the 'working-class' clubs that Stan Shipley argued 'upheld the cause of social revolution' in the 1870s.[63] 'We regarded membership as something of a privilege,' Pease stated in 1916, 'and a candidate was required not only to sign the Basis, but also to take some personal trouble as evidence of zeal and good faith.'[64] Without going so far as to issue badges, rings, or medallions signalling membership, as did many of London's exclusive clubs, the Fabians' ambiguous requirement of 'good faith' and 'zeal' did present an implicit barrier to membership.[65]

The Society never canvassed for members, nor sought a popular base in English society. As one *Review of Reviews* article explained to readers in 1896, the Society 'discourages indiscriminate admittance to membership,' with only six hundred or so men and women currently enjoying 'the right to style themselves Fabians.'[66] Shaw had

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[62] F. R. Cowell, *The Athenaeum: club and social life in London, 1824-1974* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 11-12.
[63] Stan Shipley, *Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London* (London: Journeyman Press Ltd, 1983), i.
[64] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 102.
[65] Ralph Henry Nevill, *London Clubs: their history and treasures* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1911), 35-38.
[66] 'Review: The Fabian Society,' *The Review of Reviews* (March 1896), 333.

written earlier that same year, 'it does not ask the English people to join the Fabian Society.'[67] Under the rubric of 'Fabian tactics,' he continued:

> So far are we from encouraging the rush of members that has lately come upon us, that we have actually tried to check it by insisting on stricter guarantees of the applicant's acceptance of our basis; and I do not hesitate to say that if it were not for the need of spreading the cost of our work over as large a number of subscribers as possible, we should be tempted to propose the limitation of our society in London to a hundred picked members.[68]

This is a smaller quota than even the most exclusive of London's clubs, let alone contemporary reform organisations. In its early years, the Athenaeum Club had an upper limit of 1000, and a lengthy waiting list (at one point in the nineteenth century, sixteen years).[69] The association Shaw established between 'Fabian tactics' and the Society's exclusive membership reiterated that 'permeation' relied not on popular support but expert advocacy in the right contexts. The quality of the idea was key to this liberal, self-nominating elite committed to social reform.

One of the 'stricter guarantees' the Fabians required of candidates was an internal nomination from two existing members of the Society. This was a common procedure for private clubs. At most Pall Mall and St. James' gentlemen's clubs, for instance, 'members nominated candidates, vouched for their eligibility, and added their names to a sometimes lengthy waiting list.'[70] Without articulating participation in the right set as a formal criterion, this internal vetting process compounded pre-existing social and political networks, and served as another implicit barrier to newcomers wishing to join the Society. When Catherine and H. G. Wells nominated Arnold Bennett in November 1906, for instance, they transposed their personal and professional network into the Society itself, bolstering Wells's efforts to recast the Society as a

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[67] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 3.
[68] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 23.
[69] Lejeune, *The Gentlemen's Clubs of London*, 40.
[70] Milne-Smith, *London Clubland*, 45.

popular, propagandist body.[71] Another example of this intrinsic validation at work is the corroborating function of other clubs as sites of sociability: Grant Allen, who joined the Society in 1891, and Bernard Shaw, for instance, dined together at the Savile Club, where their discussions ranged over Fabian and other business.[72]

The requirement of an annual subscription fee presented a further barrier for candidates from the 'working classes.' Again, the Society was not unique amongst clubs in requiring a fee: 'the Fabian' charged £3.3 annually, while the Athenaeum club charged 'eight guineas' (with the aristocratic connotations of the antiquated mintage) after 1875. If the regular 'lists of defaulters' circulated on the Executive and Finance Committees are taken into consideration, however, it is reasonable to suppose that 'the Fabian' was more fastidious in calling in its debts than, for instance, the generally lenient, provincial SDF branches.[73] The 'costs' to which Shaw referred were predominantly administrative, including the printing and distribution of tracts, postage, and booking venues for debates and lectures.

The Fabian archive held at the LSE contains evidence of the Society's deliberate centralised control. The Executive exercised the prerogative to rescind membership when individuals defaulted on subscription payments, or, more elusively, transgressed the 'good faith' and 'zeal' that membership of the Society implied. On the first point, as well as the 'lists of defaulters' mentioned above, there were ominous references to the 'purge of members' found throughout the meeting minutes. At an Executive meeting in July 1894, for instance, the officers present called for Grant Allen's expulsion for failing to pay his subscription fee. Bernard Shaw vouched personally for Allen, promising to

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[71] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C10, 9 November 1906, 20. Bennett resigned in 1909.
[72] Shaw, *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, (1874-97), 451.
[73] Crick, *The History of the Social-Democratic Federation*, 37.

secure the £3.3/- owing.[74] We know from personal correspondence that Shaw kept his word. In a terse letter dated 6 July 1894 Shaw relayed the tenor of the meeting to Allen himself: 'do you mean us to strike you off the Fabian roll or do not? [...] The executive committee burst into a downright fury today when your name was again brought up as a defaulter, and the secretary flatly refused to write to you again. Is this the New Hedonism?'[75] H. G. Wells, perhaps the most famous transgressor of Fabian 'good faith,' was likewise 'ordered to be dropped out' during another 'purge of members' at a Finance meeting on 9 June 1910.[76] Prior to this, Wells had also received a stern warning from Shaw for failing to conform to the expectations of Executive membership. 'Generally speaking,' Shaw admonished Wells shortly before the latter departed to the United State in 1906, 'you must identify yourself frankly with us, and not play the critical outsider and the satirist. We are all very clever; and long ago we have come to understand that we must not play our cleverness off against one another for the mere fun of it.'[77] The idea of 'good faith' in the work of the Society, and the requirement of subscription, were not simply posturing, but taken as prerequisites of membership and the smooth running of the Society.

While this context obviously predates the atrocities of twentieth-century Russia, the verb 'purge' can at best be said to express the expulsion of objectionable or extraneous matter—toxins, waste, dirt—from an organ or body. Its use in the sense of 'remov[ing] (a person regarded as undesirable) from an organisation, political party, etc.' is comparatively recent.[78] The earliest instance in the OED is from George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), in which he wrote that 'the Russian Consul-General… has

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[74] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C10, 6 July 1894, 112.
[75] Shaw, *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, (1874-97): 6 July 94, 449.
[76] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C11, 9 June 1910, 212.
[77] Shaw, *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, (1898-910), 611.
[78] "purge, v.1", Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, Online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/154877.

since been "purged."' The Fabian 'purges' of undesirable members in the 1890s and early 1900s, a seminal example of this later twentieth-century usage, fit uncomfortably within the Society's ostensibly loose incorporation, and point to an enduring tension within its social composition. Mediating 'freedom of thought' with the demands of institutional regulation, or conformity to the Society's own internal rules, meant that membership was in practice a tentative rather than a tenured privilege, liable to be rescinded at the discretion of the Executive.

Permutations of 'Permeation': Private Clubs, Fabian Tracts, and Public Debates

We have seen above that the founding Fabians attempted to mediate the necessities of institutionalisation, such as membership, subscription, and allegiance to the 'Basis,' and the liberal instinct for freedom of thought and expression. This idiosyncratic self-understanding translated into the Fabians' efforts to achieve its 'mission,' known as permeation. What emerges from the close examination above is the sense that there were two targets for Fabian 'permeation': those within, and those without, the field of practical politics. Reflecting from 1908, Bernard Shaw distilled the founding Fabians' aims in terms consonant with this perspective: they sought first, 'to provide a parliamentary program for a Prime Minister converted to Socialism,' and second, 'to make it as easy and matter-of-course for the ordinary respectable Englishman to be a Socialist as to be a Liberal or a Conservative.'[79] We might extrapolate the first to include all individuals and parties inside the political system. Considering how the Fabians 'permeated' politicians, civil servants, and policy makers, on the one hand, and the 'respectable' English public on the other, will deepen our understanding of how the

[79] 'Preface' to the 1908 edition, Shaw, *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, xxxiii.

Society managed the demands of establishing its own role in relation to British politics and society.

In a letter to Edward Pease, Sidney Webb explained the rationale behind this first kind of 'permeation.' 'Nothing is done in England,' Webb wrote, 'without the consent of a small intellectual yet political class in London, not 2,000 in number. We alone could get at that class.'[80] The two questions to consider, therefore, are how the Fabians sought to 'get at' this 'class,' and why they 'alone' were uniquely qualified to do so among all the groups advocating legislative and social reform.

One illustrative example of Fabian 'permeation' in this model is the Coefficients, a cross-party dining club that Sidney and Beatrice Webb founded in 1902 as a forum for discussing British imperial interests at home and abroad. Described by Mark Polelle as an 'Edwardian "think tank,"' the Coefficients represented a range of perspectives and professions relevant to the question of imperialism and social reform, including the Webbs and H. G. Wells, the philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell, the Fabian William Pember Reeves, who served the colonial office, the civil servants Clinton Dawkins and Henry Birchenough, the economist W. Hewins, Leo Amery and Edward Grey, who were Tory and Liberal politicians respectively, and Leo Maxse, then editor of the conservative *National Review*.[81] The idea behind this 'curious little talking and dining club,' Wells reflected in his *Autobiography* (1934), was 'to discuss the future of this perplexing, promising and frustrating Empire of ours,' with a view to bringing consensus into action.[82] The 'gather[ing] and husband[ing]' of allies motivated this cross-party

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[80] Sidney Webb to Edward Pease, in Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, 3 vols. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), Vol.1, 101.
[81] Mark Polelle, *Raising Cartographic Consciousness: the social and foreign policy vision of geopolitics in the twentieth century* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 1999), 71.
[82] H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London: The Cresset Press, 1934), Vol.2, 761.

composition.[83] Only the Fabians—middle-class, 'respectable,' non-Marxist—could meet with policy makers on equal, rather than adversarial, terms. A *Saturday Review* commentator who observed in 1899 that 'the success of Socialism is due to the fact that the Fabians have toned down their programme' recognised this advantage to Fabian tactics.[84] As a mechanism for influencing England's political 'class,' however, this select 'dining club' was too limited even for the Fabian Society. Divisions amongst members stalled discussion, and though the Coefficients ceased to meet only in 1908, it had effectively disbanded by 1906.

A more effective and enduring strategy to spread Fabian principles among England's political leaders and civil servants pursued by the Society was the drafting and dissemination of tracts. The Fabian tract series, which remains in print today, boasts among its contributors some of the twentieth century's most prominent thinkers and representatives from the British left, including Shaw and the Webbs, Edward Carpenter, Leonard Woolf, Harold Laski, G. D. H. Cole, Tony Benn, Kingsley Amis, Bernard Crick, Raymond Williams, and Tony Blair. As seen in Chapter 3, the Fabian tract series exerted an observable influence over at least one area of legislative reform in the early Edwardian period, namely education reform. As a 'permeative' strategy, the tract series fully capitalised on the founding principles of information collation and dissemination, and the capacities of members.

As documents of early 'Fabianism,' the tract series speaks to the intractable tension generated by the internal demands of institutionalisation, on the one hand, and the Fabian criterion of 'freedom of thought' on the other. As introduced through Kingsley Amis's Fabian tract above, the prefatory note that accompanied the fourth tract 'What Socialism Is' (1884), centred on this tension:

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[83] Wells, 'Faults of the Fabian,' 401-2.
[84] 'Socialists in Council,' *Saturday Review* 87, no. 2267 (8 April 1899), 421.

> The following tract has been prepared by certain members of the Fabian Society with the view of supplying information as to the opinions largely held throughout the world by those who call themselves Socialists; but it must not be assumed that these opinions are endorsed by the Fabian Society collectively, or necessarily by any member of it.[85]

Read against the broader struggle to characterise 'Fabianism' in relation to the 'British political tradition,' this prefatory note brings into view a cluster of questions to do with 'endorsement' and alignment. Like the Coefficients, which Wells described as crippled by the impossibilities of genuine pan-partisan cooperation, this 1884 tract was compromised by its very organising principle, juxtaposing an excerpt on 'Collectivism' from August Bebel's *Women in the Past, Present, and Future*, Charlotte Wilson's contribution on behalf of the London Anarchists, and an unattributed 'Fabian' preface.

As the Society's founding practical measures of 1884 anticipated, a third weapon in the Fabian arsenal was informed debate on 'social subjects.' Indeed, debating was so central to the 'special work' of the Society that in 1893 the Executive sought to employ an elocution coach to train members interested in joining the provincial and London-based lecturers register.[86] Fabius Cunctator himself, we may recall, was highly 'trained […] in the Art of speaking and persuading,' rallying to his cause a legion of Roman allies.[87] Evidence that the Fabians deployed this 'Art' in their struggle to 'get at' England's 'small intellectual yet political class' in particular is found in Shaw's 'Early History' (1899). Shaw recalled, with his idiosyncratic Americanised spelling, that in the early days Willis's Rooms functioned as the venue of choice for the early Fabians' 'favorite sport' of 'inviting politicians and economists to lecture to us, and falling on them with all our erudition and debating skill, and making them wish they had never been born.'[88] Willis's Rooms, which had until 1871 been Almack's assembly rooms, were

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[85] Charlotte Wilson, *What Socialism Is*, vol. 4, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, 1886), 2.
[86] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C5, 1 July 1893, 32.
[87] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives in eight volumes. Translated from the Greek. To which is prefixed, the life of Plutarch written by Mr. Dryden*, Vol.2, 159-60.
[88] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 18.

amongst the earliest mixed-gender social spaces in London's fashionable St. James's quarter. The unostentatious premises were let throughout the 1880s and 1890s for 'banquets, balls, public meetings, concerts, &c.,' and, as Shaw's anecdote shows, debates.[89] Playing on the proverb 'butchered to make a Roman holiday,' an English traduction of the German concept of *schadenfreude*, George Standring provided an account of how the Fabians 'butchered' the Liberal MP R. B. Haldane 'to make a Fabian holiday' at Willis's Rooms on 16 March 1888.[90] The ruthlessness of Fabian debates was proverbial.

Aside from this private Fabian 'sport' was the more accessible lecture series in which Shaw and other Fabian speakers engaged. Under the title 'How to Train for Public Life,' Shaw explained that to prepare for his own 'public' role as a Fabian, he 'attended debating societies and haunted all sorts of hole-and-corner debates and public meetings and made speeches at them.'[91] The Fabians' articulation of a 'public' vocation—and duty—situated between politics, culture, and society will recur throughout this thesis, and is one of the themes that, it will be argued, relates 'Fabianism' to a larger liberal tradition stretching from Arnold through to various cultural institutions of the twentieth century. His biographer Stanley Weintraub corroborated this aspect of Shaw's training, observing that as a speaker of 'rare' skill, 'Shaw harangued audiences of any size, from a handful in a back room to outdoor crowds of thousands—often as frequently as three times a week, and always without fee.'[92] Alice Stronach, who like the Fabians Charlotte Wilson and Amber Reeves was a graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge, considered this aspect of the Shavian legacy inseparable from the Fabians' popular image. 'Some of

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[89] E. Dawkins, 'Willis's Rooms, King Street, St. James's,' *The Musical World* 65, no. 2 (1887), 25.
[90] George Standring, *Butchered to Make a Fabian Holiday* (London1888).
[91] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 16.
[92] Stanley Weintraub, Shaw, George Bernard (1856-1950), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Reprint Edition: Oxford University Press, September 2013), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/62226 doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/36047 Accessed 17 May 2014.

the most brilliant performances of the Fabians, both in literature and on the platform,' she wrote in 1896, 'have been connected with the name of George Bernard Shaw.'[93]

Shaw was not without rivals, however, for the claim to greatest Fabian orator. Annie Besant, who joined the Fabian Executive in March 1885, was renowned as among the most famous orators of her day. Beatrice Webb attributed to her 'the voice of a beautiful soul,' while Charles Bradlaugh, with whom she served on the National Secular Society, wrote that 'Mrs. Annie Besant as an orator has few, if any equals among her own sex on either side of the Atlantic.'[94] Members of the Society were expected to make themselves available for plenary and seasonal public lectures, frequently held at Essex Hall in London. The 'Autumn Essex Hall Lecture' of 1907 entitled 'The Faith I Hold,' proposed by Charlotte Shaw, is exemplary. The Executive invited 'the best known and most representative members of the Society' to draft a lecture responding to the plenary, printed and distributed lecture lists, and envisaged the publication of the lectures in monograph form.[95] Though these public lectures were indeed more open than private Fabian debates, they nonetheless preserved an element of preaching to the choir. Only those who chose to attend could be 'permeated.' The Fabians had to evolve, therefore, alternative strategies to 'permeate' the unsuspecting English public.

Correlative to trying to 'get at' London's policy-making 'class,' we recall, was the Society's determination to make it as socially acceptable for a 'respectable Englishman' to be 'a Socialist' as 'a Liberal or a Conservative.' Political and economic historians who, like McBriar, only admit of 'Fabian doctrine' as relevant to their analysis, and exclude 'the history of the Society' and 'the Fabians as individuals,' have accordingly downplayed

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[93] Alice Stronach, 'Socialist Leaders of To-Day,' *The Windsor Magazine* 3(January 1896), 613-25 (621).
[94] Beatrice Webb and Norman MacKenzie, eds., *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Virago, 1982-5), Vol.4, 305. 4:305; 'Character Sketch: Mrs. Annie Besant,' *The Review of Reviews* 4, no. 22 (1891), 349-67 (361); 'Character Sketch: Charles Bradlaugh,' *The Review of reviews* 3, no. 15 (1891), 230.
[95] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C10, 11 January 1907, 37.

this area of Fabian 'permeation.'[96] Influencing the ('respectable') English public was a core part of the Fabian mission, and called for an altogether different strategy from the targeted distribution of policy tracts and hosting of 'drawing-room' debates among politicians and socialists. To reiterate, the Society did not seek to attract new members to its own ranks—it was not a process of increasing membership—but rather to win converts to social reform who would in turn exert pressure on legislators and civil servants and thereby indirectly steer the direction of policy.

As far as the Society's reputation among the English reading public is concerned, it was indubitably the surprise bestseller, *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (1889), which catapulted the Society from its members' 'drawing-rooms' onto the public stage. The initial print-run of 1000 copies proved woefully inadequate, with a reported 35,000 copies selling in the first six years.[97] Through the publication of this volume and the abundance of reviews and rebuttals that subsequently appeared in the English press, the Fabian 'essayists' became household names, at least within London's review-reading homes: Annie Besant, Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas, Hubert Bland, Sydney Olivier, William Clarke, and their editor, Bernard Shaw. These individuals, as speakers, writers, journalists, and 'political workers,' matched the profile of the ideal public Fabian that the Society consistently portrayed in its founding years.

In his editorial preface to the *Essays*, Shaw addressed the now familiar difficulty of balancing the 'freedom of thought' necessary for the Society's successful operation, on the one hand, and the demands of editing a representative collection of 'Fabian' essays on the other. He advised readers that although the essayists 'are all Social-Democrats,' sharing 'the common conviction of the necessity of vesting the organisation of industry and the material of production in a State identified with the whole people by complete

[96] McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics*, ix.
[97] 'Review: The Fabian Society,' 333.

Democracy,' this 'conviction is peculiar to no individual bias.' Social Democracy, he wrote:

> is a conviction to which all roads lead; and at least seven of them are represented in these Fabian Essays; so that the reader need not fear oppression here, any more than in the socialized State of the future, by the ascendancy of one particular cast of mind.[98]

The diversity of opinion that would later earn the Fabians their 'anomalous' reputation, particularly among historians committed to a Marxist interpretative vantage-point, was in fact a valued and conscious tenet of Fabian self-positioning: they offered themselves to the 'reader,' the respectable (enfranchised) Englishman, as an alternative to doctrinalism in social reform.

Shaw's description of the 'essayists' as 'communicative learners' free from one dominant perspective rather than as 'authoritative teachers' was later offset by the Victorian convention of prefacing chapters with the educational credentials of the author. The contents pages of the original 1889 edition, for instance, introduced the section on the 'Historic' basis for socialism, 'by Sidney Webb, L.L.B., Barrister at Law, Lecturer on Political Economy at the City of London College'; the 'Industrial' section by 'William Clarke, M.A. Cambridge'; the 'Moral' section by 'Sydney Olivier, B. A. Oxford'; and the section on 'Property Under Socialism' by 'Graham Wallas, M.A. Oxford.' In their first public performance as 'communicative learners,' the Fabians appropriated this established convention of foregrounding their educational credentials. Their right, that is, to advise on questions of the history and theory of English socialism was predicated on this *a priori* qualification as initiates of the educated elite.

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[98] Preface, in Shaw, *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, xxix-xl.

'Things Called Articles in the London Papers': Self-Representation in the Press

Grant Allen provided a further insight into this public side of the Fabian tactic of 'permeation' with his perhaps unlikely source, *The Woman Who Did* (1895). In this, his best-known and most controversial novel published during his membership of the Society, Allen bequeathed historians with a dual image of the early Fabians focalised through the perspectives of two generations, the 'New Woman' Herminia Barton, and her socially conventional daughter, Dolly. As the '*déclassée* […] mother of an illegitimate daughter' recently returned from the Continent, Herminia was welcomed by a 'little group of advanced London Socialists who call themselves the Fabians,' and whose meetings she regularly attended.[99] This 'little group' of men and women was dynamic, ambitious, and intelligent. Among these Fabian friends, the 'most active, the most eager, the most individual' is a man named Harvey Kynaston. A 'brilliant economist with a future before him,' Kynaston is described as a keen thinker with a social conscience who 'aimed at Cabinet.' When Allen focalised the portrait of the Fabians through Dolly's eyes, however, a different image comes into view. Familiar only with the company of her mother's Jaegar-wool clad, antivivisectionist, 'advanced' friends, Dolly—'a throwback to the Philistine'—is transfixed when she encounters a new type of man while holidaying with a 'middle-class' school friend in Upcombe.[100] Playing with a vocabulary of middle-class materialism and stereotypes of masculinity, Allen likened the Fabians to something approaching the Arnoldian 'remnant':

[99] Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, 15th ed. (London: John Lane, 1895), 142, 72, 75.
[100] Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, 191.

> For the first time in her life, [Dolly] saw something of men—real men, with horses and dogs and guns—men who went out partridge shooting in the season and rode to hounds across country, not the pale abstractions of cultured humanity who attended the Fabian Society meetings or wrote things called articles in the London papers. Her mother's friends wore soft felt hats and limp woollen collars; these real men were richly clad in tweed suits and fine linen.[101]

For the English reading public as for Dolly Barton, these 'articles in the London papers' were an identifying feature of the Fabian Society and its members. Examining these 'articles' is more feasible now than ever owing to the increasing sophistication of searchable, online databases. One such database, ProQuest's British Periodicals Online, charts a peak in articles by and about the Fabian Society and its members in the 1890s, and in 1894 specifically, a chronology that maps onto Hobsbawm's analysis of the Fabians' 'heyday' in the early 1890s.[102] While the British socialist movement may generally be characterised as highly literate, with leaders from across the diverse organisations propagandising through the socialist and mainstream press, the Fabians in particular conscientiously exploited the press as a forum for shaping public opinion.

At a meeting in September 1893, for instance, the Executive committee commissioned Bernard Shaw to draft 'a Fabian manifesto […] to be printed in Fortnightly Review.'[103] In this instance as in others, the Fabians targeted their public readership in the drafting of specific texts for circulation through the press, weaving the reception into the production of Fabian literature. The resulting manifesto, 'To Your Tents, Oh Israel!,' appeared in the *Fortnightly* two months later, in November 1893.[104] Following the success of the *Essays in Fabian Socialism*, 'To Your Tents' bears testimony to the Society's increasing confidence in occupying a space between politics and the English public. An anti-Liberal polemic, Shaw's manifesto announced to the 'review-

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[101] Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, 208.
[102] ProQuest Information and Learning, 'British Periodicals (1681-1939).' Accessed 15 May 2014.
[103] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C5, 22 September 1893, 43.
[104] Bernard Shaw, 'To Your Tents, Oh Israel!,' *Fortnightly Review* 54, no. 323 (November 1893), 569-89 (569).

reading public' that 'the Fabian Society has come to the end of its patience with Liberal Ministers.' Replete with Dickensian allusions and topical gibes, the manifesto is a statement of 'permeation,' seeking to stir the reading public to action while proposing none in its own capacity: 'the Fabian Society's function,' as Shaw advised readers, 'ceases when the permeation has been carried to saturation point.'[105]

Less formal and dry than the tract series, this periodical discourse furnishes historians with an image of the Fabian socialist that jars with that portrayed in conventional political and economic histories. The Fabians figure, that is, as something closer to the 'pale abstractions of cultured humanity' of *The Woman Who Did* than to the bombastic pedants of Leon Trotsky's 'Essays.' Historians interested in the Society for its political or economic policy have tended to overlook the public performance through which its members negotiated a role between society and politics. We can return again for the moment to Grant Allen, who contributed to the *Fortnightly Review* in 1891 one account of who the Fabians were, and what they were about.

In an article 'The Celt in English Art,' Allen claimed that a force or *esprit* called the 'Celtic influence' had radicalised English politics and art alike. With more than a passing resemblance to Matthew Arnold's ideas about the Celtic 'spiritual power' as a 'counter-power' to Saxon 'material power,' Allen argued that this 'Celtic spirit' was at that time of history invigorating the progressive movement and its leaders across England: its influence was told in the land nationalization movement, Catholicism, and the *Star*, in William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, in Henry George, Annie Besant, Oscar Wilde, the London County Council, Arthurian legend and, indeed, in the Fabians

[105] Shaw, 'To Your Tents, Oh Israel!,' 586.

themselves.[106] He offered this description of the Society he himself had only recently joined:

> The Fabians are mostly art-critics, designers, musicians, men of letters. The Celtic spirit rules throughout alike among the socialists and among the decorative artists. An acute observer may detect a strong flavour of radicalism in De Morgan lustre-ware, and a delicate dash of democracy in Miss May Morris' exquisite needlework.[107]

This 'Celtic' socialism is emphatically non-combative: the 'delicate dash of democracy' of Morris's tapestries, and the 'flavour of radicalism' of De Morgan's ceramics are unobtrusive, subtle, Fabian, we might say. May Morris and her husband Henry Halliday Sparling were both members of the Fabian Society during the 1890s, while William de Morgan was a long-time associate of her father through the Kelmscot Press. Allen's choice of the category 'men of letters' is of interest as a signal of the shifting professional and disciplinary categories of turn-of-the-century England. Shaw and Wells would have rejected this designation outright, preferring instead the more 'modern' professions of 'journalists' and 'critics.' For Allen, however, steeped in the high Victorian culture of Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold, and Thomas Huxley, the 'man of letters' was a figure of respect and authority, a polymath who commanded attention amongst the reading public he himself sought to engage.[108]

Sidney Webb contributed another striking description of the Fabian Society to the French *Revue de Paris* in 1896, four months before the International Socialist Congress was held in London. In terms that recall Allen's roll-call of professions from 1891, Webb attempted to outline the position that the Fabians claimed for themselves on account of their educational and cultural qualifications:

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[106] 'On the Study of Celtic Literature,' in Matthew Arnold, ed. *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 291-386 (298-99).
[107] Grant Allen, 'The Celt in English Art,' *Fortnightly Review* 49, no. 340 (February 1891), 267-77 (273).
[108] John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: aspects of English literary life since 1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969).

> 'They are the intellectual Proletariat of England, composed of men like George Bernard Shaw, the fine musical critic, novelist, economist, and speaker; Graham Wallas, an Oxford graduate and political historian; Grant Allen, the disciple of Herbert Spencer, a biologist and a famous novelist; May Morris (Mrs. Sparling), the daughter of William Morris, himself a fine artist; and many others, poets and journalists, economists and historians, members of the London School Board, of the County Council—one and all active and often influential politicians.'[109]

The Fabian Society institutionalised the capital—intellectual, educational, artistic, and cultural—of these otherwise diverse and unaffiliated professional and public figures. The actual 'conditions of entry,' with Pierre Bourdieu, to the Fabian Society—that is, the capacity to contribute to its 'special work' and recognition as legitimate or desirable candidates—are reflected here in the choice of those authorised to represent the Society in the public domain.[110] Bourdieu's concept of the 'reciprocal recognition' upon which writers and intellectuals relied is useful here in understanding why the founding Fabians consistently promoted their educational and professional qualifications when attempting to secure recognition as legitimate authorities before the English reading public. They did not seek the 'prizes' of practical politics, such as electoral gain or direct political representation, but rather recognition and respect as public authorities.

Webb's awkward classification, the 'intellectual Proletariat of England,' would have been less alien to French readers of the *Revue de Paris* than to English readers of *Review of Reviews* republication. Eric Hobsbawm wrote of this classification that it played a 'key role in Fabian theory.'[111] As an administrative class of 'experts,' the Fabian 'intellectual proletariat' comprised a 'comparatively uncommon […] salaried middle class' or *'nouvelle couche sociale*' in late-nineteenth century England who treated social reform as a municipal and not a moral, or so Hobsbawm argued, challenge. An alternative association with a long-established rather than a 'new' class is available, however, to the cultural historian open to treating 'Fabianism' as an 'artefact' under

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[109] 'Review: The Fabian Society,' 333.
[110] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 43.
[111] Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, 258.

negotiation within a particular historical, political, and cultural system, rather than a static theory, an '-ism,' that could be explained. The Russian revolutionary Sergei Stepniak, who became an intimate Fabian associate during his exile in London in the 1880s and 1890s and indeed joined the Society himself in 1892, had used the phrase 'intellectual Proletariat' in an 1885 article for the English socialist paper *Time* as an English synonym for the '*raznotchenzy*,' the impoverished nineteenth-century Russian nobility forced to earn a livelihood through 'intellectual activity.'[112] The *raznotchenzy* are, Stepniak had stated, 'foremost' 'in science, literature, and all free professions,' and are distinguished by the 'more or less superior mental culture of the European pattern.' In modelling the 'poets and journalists, historians and economists' and so forth of the Fabian Society as the 'intellectual Proletariat of England,' and by association with the Russian (and European) *raznotchenzy*, Webb introduced a cultural and internationalist dimension to the Fabian performance not widely recognised by twentieth-century Marxist historians for whom 'internationalism' implied nineteenth-century Marxism (see Chapter 5).[113]

As well as enriching our understanding of how the founding Fabians positioned themselves as artists, writers, and 'intellectuals' (and not simply 'experts' and 'professionals'), this periodical discourse also corroborates aspects outlined in the institutional analysis of the Society offered above. In particular, it confirms that the consonance between the Fabian classical and strategic connotations and the Society's own methods and composition were not only conscious, but a position from which the Fabians asserted their authority *vis-à-vis* other socialist groups and political parties. One Executive member, Fred Hammill, for instance, wrote to the *Fortnightly Review*—ever a

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[112] Sergei Stepniak, 'The Russian Storm-Cloud,' *Time* 13, no. 11 (1885), 509-28 (514).
[113] Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, 152-3.

platform for Fabian performances under Frank Harris's radical editorship—in the wake of popular controversy over Shaw's manifesto:

> The peculiarity of the Fabian Society is that it is a purely propagandist body, taking no direct political action in it own name, running no candidates, making no attempt to enlist its converts in its own ranks, but permeating all existing political and Social organisations with Socialistic and Democratic doctrines, stirring them up to action, pointing out the best opportunities to them, and supplying them with information, documents, a policy, and, if necessary, brains.[114]

Rather than being incidental to the institution itself, the founders' attempts to occupy a space that was simultaneously outside, and yet in dialogue with, the field of practical politics was central to its early methods and organisation. With recognisably 'Fabian tactics,' it eschewed 'direct political action' in preference for indirect, predominantly literate, methods: 'information, documents, a policy,' and 'brains.'

This last classification 'brains' was, like 'men of letters,' one of the indicators signalling the shifting professional and social boundaries of turn-of-the-century England. In use throughout the early- and mid-nineteenth century to describe a person who was the 'mastermind' behind a scenario or, simply a 'clever or studious person,' it acquired in the context of the British socialist revival the connotation of the 'intellectual proletariat,' or salaried, professional class.[115] Alice Stronach once again provided an illustrative instance in a specifically Fabian context when she wrote, recalling Crozier's doubts about the putative socialism of 'Fabianism' itself, that 'the Fabian Society represents socialism—if indeed Fabianism can be called socialism—of the middle class, of the brain-worker, the professional man.'[116] By endorsing the public image of the Fabians as the 'intellectual proletariat' with Webb, and the more English variant 'brains' with Hammill, the Executive deliberately aligned the Society with the 'small intellectual yet political class,' or a liberal, intellectual elite, responsible for 'getting things done.'

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[114] Fred Hammill, 'Labour Representation,' *Fortnightly Review* 55, no. 328 (April 1894), 546-56 (550-1).
[115] "brains, n.", Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, Online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22536.
[116] Stronach, 'Socialist Leaders of To-Day,' 617.

As with the Society's membership, the Executive Committee actively policed the public image it promoted in the British periodical press. Records show that the Executive exercised the right to authorise and disown all public statements made on behalf of the Society. When, for instance, the *Sun* published an 'unauthorised' report of a Fabian members' meeting, and the *Standard* a proposal for tariff reform signed 'by a member of the Fabian Executive,' the breaches of Fabian procedure were debated at an Executive meeting under the rubric, 'Question of Privilege.'[117] In both instances, the Executive dispatched Bernard Shaw to 'draft' the requisite retractions. An apologetic handwritten note in the margin records that George Robert Stirling Taylor, author of numerous books on English politics and an Executive officer, claimed responsibility for the *Standard* article, though he denied having approved the offending signature. The 'Question of Privilege'—who might speak publicly for and of the Society—was taken seriously by an Executive highly conscious that the shaping of public opinion was a two-way game.

In fact, the Executive was so conscious of the Society's public image that in June 1893 it subscribed to the world's first print-media clipping agency, Romeike and Curtice, to monitor what was being said about the Society, and by whom, in the British and international press.[118] This hypervigilient awareness of the Society's public presence was, if not unique, then very much a distinctive feature of the Society not only in the context of other socialist organisations of *fin de siècle* England, but amongst institutions and individuals with a stake in public opinion, including political parties and public figures. The London Fabians were particularly interested at this time in how the Society was being represented within the labour press, subscribing to clippings from the *Labour Gazette*, James Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader*, *Women's Trade*, and the *Union Journal*. The

[117] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C10, 7 February 1908, 167.
[118] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book, C5, 1 June 1894, 103.

Fabians were intent, it would seem, on working out their relation as 'brains' to the Labour movement.

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There is a 'favourite saying' among Fabian histories, attributed to Sidney Webb, that the work of the early Fabian Society was the work of individual members.[119] While this saying reflects the Society's distinctive efforts to give its members freedom of thought and conscience, it simultaneously downplays the considerable control that the Executive enjoyed over its individual members on the 'Question of Privilege.' The institutional controls examined above—'purges,' 'lists of defaulters,' membership limitations, the recanting of 'unauthorised' periodical contributions in the name of the Society—severally and collectively speak to the complicated social and institutional identity that the Society mediated in private and in public in its founding decades. Balancing autonomy with authority was a recurrent difficulty in these foundational years.

The early Fabians' attempts to establish a position for the Society free from the logic of party politics need to be considered not in isolation but as a self-positioning or performance that in reality had to be negotiated within a field occupied by other players. The politicians, civil servants, and the general public that the Fabians sought to influence were not simply passive receptacles awaiting 'permeation,' but active agents with various political and symbolic stakes in the *status quo*, and alternative visions for reform. While some were sympathetic to the Fabian performance, others contested it: it is in the reverberation between these positions that 'Fabianism' accumulated meaning as a metonymy for the Society, its members, and its mission. To understand this process, therefore, we need to examine closely these reverberations in the 'struggle' to impose a definition on Fabian socialism.

[119] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 77; Margaret Cole, 'The Fabian Society,' *The Times*, no. 7 (12 January 1954), 7.

2 'Fabianism'

If 'Fabian strategy' was a feature of the early- and mid-Victorian cultural doxa, 'Fabianism' was a product of the 1890s. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines 'Fabianism' as a noun signifying 'the doctrines and principles of the Fabian Society,' offers three, illustrative examples.[1] The earliest comes in a letter dated 28 February 1890 that Bernard Shaw sent to Henry William Massingham, fellow Fabian and editor of the *Star*. In this letter, Shaw admonished the newspaper for committing 'a blasphemy against the Fabianism which made it famous' by ignoring the 'Eight Hours Question.'[2] Edward Marsh's 1918 biography of Rupert Brooke provides the penultimate example, with a quotation from the socialist politician Hugh Dalton. Dalton, who joined the Cambridge Fabian Society with Brooke at the end of their first term in 1906, recalled that 'during our years at Cambridge, Fabianism was at its high tide.'[3] The final example comes from a story by Katherine Keeling called 'Elizabeth,' serialised in the conservative *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1924: 'Fabianism touched her during her last year at school,' as Keeling had written of her Russian-born, English-educated protagonist.[4]

Between Shaw's epistolary reference of 1890 and Keeling's *Blackwood's* story of 1924, however, 'Fabianism' underwent vast semantic transformations not registered in this lexicographical definition. The following chapter recovers this indeterminacy by examining the pragmatic uses of 'Fabianism,' considered as a metonymy for a diverse range of characteristics attributed to the Fabian Society and its members from its earliest appearance in English usage until the outbreak of the First World War. Bringing

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[1] "Fabianism, n.", Oxford English Dictionary Oxford University Press, Online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/67382 .
[2] Shaw, *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, 28 February 1890, Vol.2, 243-44 (244).
[3] Edward Howard Marsh, *Rupert Brooke: a memoir* (London 1918), 26.
[4] Katherine Keeling, 'Elizabeth,' *Blackwood's Magazine* 1(Sepember 1924), 385-408 (393).

a cultural-historical perspective to bear on the form, history, and meaning of 'Fabianism' involves treating it not as a noun with a static meaning, but as an 'artefact' or 'text' produced by human agents struggling to make and maintain meaning in specific contexts over time. These agents, both as individuals and groups, operated in a particular discursive context, drawing on recognised systems of authority and social relations, publication genres, formal and rhetorical conventions, and political traditions in order assert a dominant definition before the English reading public, and other political, cultural, and, as we will see, literary commentators.

The Fabians negotiated their entrance into English public life from a weak position. As aspirants within a field dominated by politically and institutionally more stable groups and individuals, their efforts to assert their autonomy from these factors seemed almost designed to leave them vulnerable to criticism from established political parties, for instance, and from commentators writing for politically-aligned newspapers and magazines. As explored below, in its founding decades the Fabian Society did not constitute a stable, institutional identity, but rather was construed as many things by contemporaries trying to place it within English political and intellectual life. Conteporary responses to the Society in the British press accordingly registered a fundamental indeterminacy over what the Society was, and where it belonged. If the Fabian Society was not a stable phenomenon, 'Fabianism' was less so. Before the First World War, this label symbolised a cluster of cultural, and specifically literary, positions that spoke to the tensions of the day. Accordingly, the Fabians received sustained criticism not just from politically but culturally respected groups and individuals throughout the 1890s, a factor not adequately recognised or analysed in available scholarship on the topic. This chapter focuses on this broader discursive context,

bringing the Fabians' self-understanding from Chapter 1 into dialogue with those individuals and groups with whom they struggled over definitions of 'Fabianism.'

What is the Fabian Society?

> Now the Fabian Society, since we have noticed the phenomenon, has always appeared to us as if it had been formed by a number of these oddities coming together and saying, 'Let's band ourselves into a society.' The blend of individual peculiarities which would thus be produced would account for the collective type with which students are familiar under the name of Fabianism: a mixture of dreary, gassy doctrinairism and crack-brained farcicality, set off by a portentous omniscience and a flighty egotism not to be matched outside the wards of a lunatic asylum.[5]
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> 'The Fabian Squib,' *Speaker* (1893)

A primary obstacle for the accepted definition of 'Fabianism' as the 'principles and doctrine of the Fabian Society' is the simple fact that, at least in the 1890s and early 1900s, there was no consensus as to what the Society actually *was*. While Alan McBriar could write after the Second World War that the 'early Fabian Society was, no doubt, a body of "middle-class" or "bourgeois" intellectuals,' and though the Society advertises itself today as the 'oldest political think-tank' in England, the Fabian Society in its founding decades enjoyed no such institutional confidence.[6] It was, rather, construed and re-construed time and again by contemporaries who, like the Liberal *Speaker* commentator, were trying to understand its function and position in relation to other groups and individuals working at the time. The above description of the Society as a fustian 'number of oddities' banded incongruously together is typical of the uncertainty found in early responses to the Fabian Society once it had entered the public domain, and shows the consequence of its efforts to negotiate its freedom from political or doctrinal affiliation. In particular, the Society's idiosyncratic identity and status—its elite, educated membership, its oblique relationship to the other bodies of the socialist

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[5] Anon., 'The Fabian Squib,' *The Speaker* 8(1893), 488-90; Hammill, 'Labour Representation,' 489.
[6] McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics*, 6.

movement, and its indeterminate function in relation to practical politics, the press, and the English public—elicited a confused and often contradictory response from contemporaries struggling to classify it according to the established institutional structures and political orthodoxies that the Fabians themselves were in fact trying to resist. As Herbert Vivian, writing for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1906, despaired of the 'small group of fanciful philosophers known as the Fabian Society,' the main 'difficulty is to find out what they mean or what they want.'[7] He was not alone in his frustration.

The literature accompanying the Fabians' transformation from a 'drawing-room' discussion group to actors on the public stage provided the main documents for contemporaries trying to decipher just who these 'fanciful philosophers' were, and what they wanted. 'The Fabian Squib,' for instance, with its connotations of anti-climax, appeared in response to Bernard Shaw's 'To Your Tents, Oh Israel!' from November 1892. Other visible manifestations of this transformation—which included the Fabian lectures and debates held at Essex Hall and other London venues, the *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (1889), and particularly their contributions to the English press—account for the fact that the Society in its earliest years was often written up as something approximating a literary or philosophical, rather than a political body.

This characterisation was further compounded by the Society's position in relation to the other bodies of the socialist movement, including the Social Democratic Federation (1883), the Clarion movement (1891), and the Independent Labour Party (1893). On the question of its genesis, that is, the Fabian Society was widely reported as a literate, even literose, departure from these more highly institutionalised groups. Explaining the 'advent' of the British socialist movement for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1906, E. Hume for instance suggested that 'a few young *littérateurs* founded the Fabian

[7] Herbert Vivian, 'Pretended Labour Parties,' *Fortnightly Review* 79, no. 469 (1906), 151-62 (151).

Society' in the early 1880s to institute 'a more academic body than Henry Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation.'[8] The elitist connotations of the French '*littérateur*' conveyed the perception that as a 'more academic body,' the Fabian lecturers, journalists, and 'essayists' were to be distinguished from the 'horny-handed' sons of the SDF on account of their superior educational and cultural capital. In this article as elsewhere, the Society was defined relationally: although the Society was allied with the SDF within the space of the socialist movement, it was within this context remarkable for its autonomy from Marxist or socialist orthodoxy, and for its pronounced interests, and authority, in intellectual and cultural projects.

An early instance of this confluence between the 'academic' nature of the Society and its unusual relation to the socialist movement is found in the *Scots Observer* in 1890. With the *Essays* still hot from the printing press, the reviewer of this conservative periodical introduced the as-yet obscure Society to readers as 'a kind of annexe or offshoot of the aforementioned [Social Democratic] Federation, and which seems to be composed of academic or literary members.'[9] The reviewer based this judgement on the recent publication of the *Essays*, a volume that exhibited, in his opinion, 'a moderation and a practical, cautious determination' that justified why 'the society has called itself by the name of Fabius *Cunctator*' [original italics]. In line with earlier nineteenth-century examples of 'Fabian strategy' seen in Chapter 1, this *Scots Observer* reviewer perceived 'Fabian' tactics as typically 'English,' and an alternative to Continental socialism. Espousing the doctrine neither of Marx nor of Lassalle, the *Essays* bore the hallmarks of a recognisably 'English habit of mind': its tone was 'eclectic,' 'practical,' and 'patient.' If the conservative *Scots Observer* offered a surprisingly favourable take on Fabian socialism, it was because of this perception that any revolutionary connotations were

[8] E. Hume, 'The Advent of Socialism,' *Fortnightly Review* 79, no. 471 (1906), 475-86 (177).
[9] 'Review: Fabian Socialism,' *The Scots Observer* 3, no. 66 (1890), 384-85 (384).

diffused for English consumption through its 'literary' or 'academic' composition, and that 'Fabian' socialism was substantively different from its revolutionary, Continental counterpart.

The implication of the Society's 'eclectic' 'tone' for its classification as an institution in public life may further be seen in a 1909 *Times* article outlining the British socialist movement. This article is exemplary for its progression through the rhetoric common to contemporary accounts of this recent chapter of British history. Having opened with an outline of the three other 'principal organisations' of the socialist movement—the SDF, ILP, and the Clarion Fellowship—the reviewer wrote of the Fabian Society that it is 'a kind of mutual elevation society' whose 'real position' *vis-à-vis* these other socialist institutions remained 'in doubt.' The reviewer's free-floating qualification, '*real* position,' called into question the Society's presumed or ostensible position in the socialist movement. The Fabians themselves were to blame, the reviewer claimed: their 'haziness of thought, their indeterminateness, their hesitation, and their involved language' brought about this confusion over their relationship, particularly with the more avowedly Marxist SDF. He found them, however, 'indeterminateness' notwithstanding, to be 'a very influential element in the Socialist movement.'

The logic of this article implied that the Society's precarious 'position'—distinctive only for its 'plasticity and absence of programme'—is seen as a consequence of its function, which 'has always been to educate, to instil Socialistic ideas gently, to inspire,' and 'to work indirectly through others.' The Society's position (autonomous), that is, is a consequence of its function (education). This kind of 'propagandistic work'—which we recognise as 'permeation'—appealed to the emerging, professional class produced by 'modern education,' particularly 'clerks, teachers, journalists,' and 'clergymen,' further compounding the Society's distance from the 'working-class'

movement. All these factors resulted in the Society's unique composition within the field:

> Eleven Fabians are members of Parliament, and the society supports the Labour party; but its real work lies outside of politics, and is carried on chiefly by the distribution of literature and lectures. It contains several well-known writers, and may almost be called a literary society.[10]

The reviewer of this *Times* article named specific 'literary' Fabians, including Harley Granville Barker, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Rev. Stewart Headlam, and Sidney Webb, to corroborate this characterisation of the Society's function 'outside of politics.' In its own hesitant construction of the Fabian Society as a hybrid between a 'mutual elevation society' and something approximating 'a literary society,' this *Times* review raises questions about what constituted these institutions in the context of the 1890s and 1900s. 'The Fabian' could not be categorised as 'a literary society' on terms comparable to, for instance, the Irish Literary Society, founded in 1892 with a commitment to finding a specifically Irish audience, within 'literary London,' for a new, national literature.[11] Rather, the *Times* claimed it 'may almost' qualify as a 'literary society' on the basis of its subscription, *modus operandi*, and function: that is, its members used literary means to conduct the Society's 'real work' through 'literature and lectures.' This characterisation has been almost entirely lost from twenty-first century scholarship on the Society's early history.

The popular perception that the Fabians' appropriate 'position' was 'outside of politics'—that their function was literary and educational, and not political, or representative—conditioned responses to their activities once the Fabians entered the public domain. When the Society issued its anti-Liberal election manifesto in November 1892, for instance, many astute political commentators recognised Shaw's performance

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[10] 'The Socialist Movement In Great Britain,' *The Times*, no. 8 (1909), 8.
[11] Robert Welch, *The Concise Oxford Companion to Irish literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html?book=t55) Accessed 11 June 2014.

as an abdication of the fundamental Fabian criterion of autonomy. The Liberal author of 'The Fabian Squib' warned readers that Shaw's clarion call to the enfranchised public to abandon the Liberal Party in 'To Your Tents, Oh Israel!' was a 'distressing' signal that 'the Fabians would come down from the clouds and enter the field of practical politics.'[12] This 'clouds' metaphor reinforced the perception of the Fabians' 'academic'—in the sense of impractical and theoretical—function. The Fabians themselves, furthermore, did not seem to realise 'that in "coming to the end of their patience" [with the Liberal Party] they have come to the end of their Fabianism.'[13] Judged against the classical 'Fabian' tradition, which, as seen in Chapter 1, was practically a nineteenth-century *cliché* signalling indirect methods and delay, the Society was condemned for abandoning its non-partisan remit and intruding upon the political field by actively campaigning for, or against, a specific political party.

In the contemporary responses surveyed above, the reviewers' consistently qualified language attests to the difficulties they encountered when attempting to correlate the Society's educational function—the distribution of literature, provision of lectures, the 'gentle' dissemination of socialist ideas—with its structural relation to the political system and the Labour movement. The Fabians' quintessential 'indeterminateness,' that is, solicited an indeterminate response: the Society '*may almost* be called a literary society,' is '*a kind of* annexe' of the SDF, '*seems* to be' composed of 'literary members,' 'is *a sort of* mutual elevation society.' Sitting comfortably neither within the socialist movement, nor within the political or literary fields, the 'fanciful' Society underwent numerous, often conflicting, combinations and permutations of classification in the hands of contemporaries trying to impose a conceptual and sociological definition of its function.

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[12] Anon., 'The Fabian Squib,' 489.
[13] Anon., 'The Fabian Squib,' 489.

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Part of the difficulty for contemporaries faced with classifying 'Fabianism' in a certain way lay in the broader uncertainty surrounding the relationship between the various groups of the 'socialist revival' and the political establishment. It was an uncertainty fully recognised by thinkers at the time: if agents struggled to make and maintain the meaning of 'Fabianism' through classifying the Fabian Society, equally they struggled to define 'Socialism' itself. 'Socialism,' wrote W. H. Mallock at the introduction of a *Fortnightly* rebuttal of 'Fabian economics,' 'is a word which is, by many people, used in senses so vague and so contradictory, as often to deprive it of all arguable meaning.'[14] To reinstate some 'meaning' to the term, some commentators tried to observe, with Pease, 'a clear line between Socialism and politics.'[15] On one side of this 'line' were the traditional parties (Liberal and Tory) and the Westminster system of representation, and 'political questions' about, for instance, Home Rule and Church Disestablishment; on the other, was the question of how to educate the English public on economics and 'social conditions.'

A prominent proponent of this kind of distinction was H. G. Wells, who said of 'Socialism' that it is 'all the religion I possess.' In a 1906 lecture delivered to the Fabian Society and subsequently published in the *Fortnightly Review*, Wells wrote of 'true Socialism' that it is not a 'creed,' an 'orthodoxy,' or a 'party,' but a 'plan of a new life for the world, a new and better way of living, a change of spirit and substance' that should 'be served by thought and expression, in art, in literature, in scientific statement and life,' and not by narrow 'institutions' or political 'imperatives.'[16] When contemporaries described 'the Fabian' as almost 'a literary society' operating 'outside of politics,'

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[14] W. H. Mallock, 'Fabian Economics I,' *Fortnightly Review* 55, no. 326 (February 1894), 159-82 (159).
[15] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 131.
[16] H. G. Wells, 'Socialism and the Middle Classes,' *Fortnightly Review* 80, no. 479 (November 1906), 785-98 (785, 786).

therefore, they were expressing a legitimate possibility of this extra-political definition of 'Socialism.' Even when judged by the logic of this inside/outside binary, however, 'Fabianism' (which we have seen was 'outside of politics') was construed in contradictory terms: for some it was representative English socialism, for some idiosyncratic, for others not socialism at all.

While commentators on the political side of this binary, such as the Liberal commentators above, found the Fabians too 'anomalous'—another way of saying too autonomous—Wells, who positioned himself squarely in the socialism side, lodged the inverse complaint, that the Fabians were, to the contrary, too highly institutionalised. According to Wells's definition of socialism as 'a profound change in the circle of human thought and motive,' 'Fabianism' represented 'the official and organised side.' 'Fabianism' was, that is, 'administrative Socialism,' dedicated to the admirable but unambitious programme of 'old age pensions' and 'municipal milk,' 'museum and school construction' and 'educational endowment.'[17] They peddled, in other words, municipal, or 'gas-and-water,' socialism, limited to institutional bodies such as the London County Council and London School Board.

As Wells himself conceded, however, 'administrative' or not, 'Fabianism' *was* socialism for many, so far as its exposition in England went at the turn of the century.[18] This was a claim made by the Fabians themselves: in his contribution to the *Essays*, Sidney Webb wrote of the volume that it presented a 'complete exposition of English Socialism in its latest, maturest phase.'[19] Many took Webb at his word. The Society's committed antagonist W. H. Mallock, a conservative critic whom Raymond Williams evoked as valedictorian to the High Victorian, Tory-Anglican tradition, for instance,

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[17] Wells, 'Socialism and the Middle Classes,' 789-90.
[18] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, Vol.1, 247.
[19] W. G. Smith, 'Fabian Essays in Socialism,' *The Economic Review* (January 1891), 124-27 (124).

introduced the Fabians as 'the ablest, the clearest, and most practical exponents in this country of what Socialism really is.'[20] As an 'intellectual' with a stake in political commentary, however, Mallock revealed through his polemic his own interests in earning the authority to explain for the English reading public 'what Socialism really is,' and how they ought to relate to it. In discrediting the part, he sought to discredit the whole, and to bolster his own authority as a conservative commentator.

Others were less convinced by the Fabians' claim to speak for the socialist movement. Reflecting the perception of the Society's idiosyncratic bearings, Herbert Vivian, also writing for the *Fortnightly Review*, described the Society not as a representative body but as an 'isolated' and 'restricted' 'right wing' of the Labour movement. Neither as committed to the 'working classes' nor as 'serious' as either the moderate centre, the ILP, or the 'violent,' far-left wing, the SDF, the Society was seen as an anomaly amongst the 'pretended labour parties' then stirring up British political life.[21] The qualification 'pretended' addressed the notion that socialists had no place in representative politics given they had to run (at least until the establishment of the ILP) as Liberal or Tory candidates, and that the Marxist faction sought the overthrow of the very structures of governance that the new 'labour parties' sought to occupy. Attributing the 'vagaries' of the Society to individual members (we recall Hobsbawm's 'anomalies'), Vivian described the Fabians as 'sciolists' who 'have evolved unpractical solutions of the problems of poverty in the arm-chairs of libraries.' 'The trouble of appreciating what the Fabian Society wants is enhanced,' Vivian remarked, 'by the fact that is members do not know themselves.' 'Fabianism' was, he concluded, an idiosyncratic, 'impractical' interpretation of what elsewhere would pass for socialism.

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[20] Mallock, 'Fabian Economics I,' 160.
[21] Vivian, 'Pretended Labour Parties,' 161.

As a consequence of the Society's fundamental 'indeterminateness,' however, many contemporaries struggled to see how it could be categorised as socialist at all, whether 'representative' or 'right wing.' This problem again may be traced to the Society's idiosyncratic status as a socialist body, and to its avowed freedom from recognised, socialist doctrine. Alice Stronach introduced the leaders of the socialist movement to readers of the *Windsor Magazine* in 1896, for instance, by questioning 'if indeed Fabianism can be called socialism,' given it represented the 'middle' classes, and not, as quoted above, the 'horny-handed sons of toil' of the 'industrial classes.'[22] Making a comparable observation of the Society's constitutional gradualism more than ten years later, John Beattie Crozier advised his *Fortnightly* readers that the Fabians 'are no more Socialists in the ordinary acceptation of the term than I am a Socialist.'[23] Crozier sought to offset the Fabians' aim, in Bernard Shaw's words, of making it as acceptable for the 'respectable Englishman' to be a Socialist as a Liberal or a Conservative by denying that there was in truth any relationship between 'Fabianism' and 'Socialism' as it was popularly construed:

> Unless the Fabians and the 'Intellectuals' of the Socialist party are bent on confusing and confounding all possible categories and issues, they have no right to lend the weight of their prestige, their intellectual status, or their authority among the cultivated, to the name Socialism as a separate political party in the State.[24]

Crozier made a moral argument against the perceived contamination of the Fabians' cultural 'authority' with political interests. Imbuing the 'Intellectuals' with a sense of wariness through a capital 'I' and inverted commas, Crozier claimed they 'have no right' to deploy the capital intrinsic to one 'category' (culture) in the 'name' of another (politics). We recall the *Speaker's* warning that the Fabians were descending from 'the clouds' and obtruding upon the 'field of practical politics.' In this instance, however,

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[22] Stronach, 'Socialist Leaders of To-Day,' 613-625 (617).
[23] Crozier, 'A Challenge to Socialism,' 803.
[24] Crozier, 'A Challenge to Socialism,' 805.

Crozier made explicit that the Fabians' claim to cultural and intellectual 'authority' preceded their claim to political influence. Their advocacy, that is, of an English 'Socialist party' (though this is a contestable point) was advanced from their *a priori* 'authority among the cultivated.' A writer reviewing the *Fabian Essays* for the *Economic Review* in 1890 coined the formula the 'New Socialism' to accommodate this ambiguity. Though the phrase did not catch on, it did encapsulate the sense that Fabian 'Intellectuals' (on which more below) were recognised as doing something substantively different both in terms of the Marxist tradition, and the contemporary Labour movement.[25]

Its position 'outside of politics' notwithstanding, the Fabian Society did establish closer ties with representative politics than many other bodies within the contemporary reform movement. Unlike the SDF, which sought the 'abolition of the House of Lords,' or interest groups like the Humanitarian League, the Fabian Society collaborated directly on the drafting of legislation with representatives from established political parties, including, as we shall see in Chapter 3, Arthur Balfour's Conservative Government.[26] As Shaw wrote in the 'Report on Fabian Policy' in 1896, 'caring nothing by what name any party calls itself, or what principles, Socialist or other, it professes,' the Society would collaborate with any party capable of facilitating Fabian ends.[27] With the founding of the Labour Representative Committee (LRC) in February 1900, however, the Fabians entered into a formal alliance with the 'Labourists' of the ILP, the Marxists of the SDF, and trades union leaders who were predominantly Liberal. The LRC was the institutional forebear of the British Labour Party of today.

The Fabians' allegiance with the organised Labour movement brings into focus the challenges its 'peculiarities' presented to those concerned with formulating who the

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[25] W. G. Smith, 'Fabian Essays in Socialism,' *The Economic Review* (1891), 124-27 (124).
[26] 'The Socialist Movement In Great Britain,' 8.
[27] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 4.

Fabians were and what they wanted. In an article entitled 'Socialists in Council,' published on 8 April 1899, a commentator for the *Saturday Review* reported on the Fabians' presence at the 7th Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party held in Leeds the previous week.[28] The resulting opinion piece presented an astute interpretation of the Society's oblique relationship with both organised politics and the English public:

> Outside the field of party warfare, the Socialists are the intellectuals of politics, and are to the Independent Labour party as head is to body—at least that is the relation which Mr. Sidney Webb would fain establish between the kid-glove philosophers of the Fabian Society and the horny-handed sons of toil.

As would Crozier in 1908, and others before and since, this reviewer found a solution for the Society's problematic positioning between society, culture, and representative politics in the new category, 'intellectuals.' Distinguishing between Fabian 'intellectuals' and Labour 'representatives,' the commentator concluded, in what should be by now familiar terms, that for the former, 'their aloofness from party politics is the secret of their success.' Were the Fabians to relinquish this autonomy and enter the political field, 'they would cease to be interesting, and they would miss their true vocation, which is to educate the public to think for themselves, and to take a serious view of their civic duties.' As discussed more in the Postscript, this is a seminal, specifically English, definition of the Fabian 'intellectual' as having a public vocation poised between politics, culture, and society, in which 'aloofness from party politics' and a duty to 'educate the public to think for themselves' are complementary prerequisites. As Bruce Robbins remarks in *Secular Vocations* (1993), however, herein lies the 'fatal logic'—the logic of autonomy—of the 'intellectuals' disappearance': 'the more intellectuals are seen as grounded in society, the less they are seen as truly critical or oppositional, hence the less

[28] 'Socialists in Council,' 421.

they are themselves. The less they are themselves, the more they can only seem to be glimpsed, for the last time, in the act of vanishing.'[29]

This was a precarious function, and one that the rest of the Labour movement held in dubious regard. In terms redolent of Webb's 'intellectual Proletariat' from Chapter 1, the *Saturday Review* commentator highlighted a specific point of contention between the Fabians and the ILP representatives gathered in Leeds:

> It was in vain that Mr. Sidney Webb perorated about civic duty; explained his schemes of municipal collectivism; and recommended that brains should be paid their market price. The Labourists sniffed at over-paid intellectuals, and declared that the whole duty of the Labourist is to raise the wages of 'his class.'[30]

Embedded in emergence of the Fabian 'intellectuals' as figures in British public life were the underlying anxieties consequent upon the shifting professional and political landscape of the 1890s and early 1900s. 'Labourists' steeped in Marxist rhetoric opposed the indirect Fabian approach to reform. Although the Fabians themselves were still tentatively negotiating this tension between 'intellectual Socialism' and 'manual labour,' once they successfully managed it, the reviewer claimed, 'they will pass into a position of power, and become, if not statesmen, what are called political factors.'[31] Operating by definition 'outside the field of party warfare,' this 'political factor,' the 'intellectual' with a public 'duty,' could not be relied upon to conform to the logic of doctrine. As a new professional category (the 'over-paid intellectuals') with a stake in the socialist movement, however, neither could they be relied upon to be 'disinterested' in questions of political interest.

The contemporary responses surveyed above convey the enduring uncertainty over the Fabian Society's function and position in relation to the field that arose out of

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[29] Bruce Robbins, *Secular Vocations: intellectuals, professionalism, culture*, Haymarket series (London: Verso, 1993), 12.
[30] 'Socialists in Council,' 421.
[31] 'Socialists in Council,' 421.

its quintessentially 'Fabian' strategies: too political to be a 'literary society,' the Fabian Society was nonetheless construed as too 'academic' to be a political body. If the Fabian Society was not a stable 'phenomenon,' it is unsurprising that 'Fabianism'—as a class-name or descriptive term denoting the Society's associated characteristics or 'peculiarities'—was even less so. Throughout the 1890s and 1900s 'Fabianism' was not used explicitly to designate the 'doctrines and principles' of the Society but to symbolise the broader cultural and extra-political resonances introduced above.

What is 'Fabianism'?

If cultural objects fulfil a function for the groups that produce them, equally they fulfil a function for the other writers, intellectuals, and agents in the field. While 'Fabianism' as one such cultural product was used by many to signal the Society's doctrines and beliefs, in line with the *OED* definition, others used the word metonymically in a vast range of semantic contexts: these included more nuanced cultural references to academic or literary entities, to the Society's Westminster-related institutional status, and to its position within the socialist movement. The diverse uses of 'Fabianism' register the indeterminacy of its institutional bearing between politics, culture, and society at the turn of the century.

An examination of the history and shifting meaning of 'Fabianism' enables us to turn from the indeterminate social status of the Society explored above towards its cultural connotations in a number of other contexts. Its ambiguous, or changing, position is made manifest in the writing of three figures explored below, each struggling to define 'Fabianism' for their own purposes: William Ernest Henley (1849-1903), editor of the conservative *National Observer*; William Earl Hodgson, assistant editor under Alfred Austin of the equally conservative *New Review*; and journalist Alice Stronach, author of *A Newnham Friendship* (1901) and writer for the illustrated monthly *Windsor Magazine*.

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The first of these, William Ernest Henley, speaks to a highly consecrated literary circle whose own position in the field was defined in relation to that being carved out by the Fabians. After an unremarkable career as a poet and dramatist, Henley made his name as editor of the *Scots* (later *National*) *Observer* and the literary elder of what he called his 'Young Men,' a small group of younger writers—including Robert Louis Stevenson, Thomas Hardy, and W. B. Yeats—whom Max Beerbohm pithily nicknamed the 'Henley Regatta.'[32] Peter D. McDonald remarked of the 'Regatta' that, while it was 'neither as homogenous nor as focused as' literary circles like Yeats's Rhymers' Club, its politically and aesthetically diverse initiates were united by 'their shared principles of cultural legitimacy and their admiration for Henley's strident purism.'[33] A classic example of what this 'strident purism' looked like in the early 1890s was, as McDonald has shown, Joseph Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus*, serialised in the *New Review* before publication as a limited edition with Heinemann in 1898. With its 'impressionistic style,' 'anxiously self-legitimising preface,' and clear 'intertextual liaisons with the journalism and criticism of Henley's circle,' Conrad's early novella embodied a counterpoint to the popular 'literature of the future' that, we will see below, this circle associated with 'Fabianism.'

As early as 1891, the Fabians had registered on Henley's radar as rivals to his model of 'cultural legitimacy.' As the editor of a literary review and charismatic leader of a self-conscious *avant-garde*, Henley had a vested interest in defining and defending 'pure' literature and the role of the 'writer' (and indeed the literary critic) as something fundamentally distinct from what was popularly associated with the 'well-known

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[32] Henley, William Ernest (1849-1903), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, Online, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/62226.Accessed 3 March 2014.
[33] Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914*, Cambridge Studies in Publishing and Printing History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 33.

writers' and 'intellectuals' of the Fabian Society. It was as a platform for Henley's literary circle that the *National Observer* provided two of the earliest instances of 'Fabianism' in the English press. In both instances, 'Fabianism' furnished this circle's need for a metonymy symbolising a position that was culturally and aesthetically antagonistic to its own. We can read in these efforts to define 'Fabianism,' and by negative association the periodical's own position, therefore, a territorialism about 'cultural legitimacy' and definitions of 'literature.' The commentaries also exhibited an anxiety reflecting the shifting professional positions available in the literary field of the 1890s: the language of de-legitimisation evoked in these articles pitted the venerable, masculine, vocations of the 'literary genius' and 'man of letters' against the 'modern' professions of the 'journalist,' the 'intellectual,' and the 'socialist.'

In the first of these, an article entitled 'The Future of Literature' published in the *National Observer* in January 1891, the author warned that under socialism, 'pure literature' would be a relic of the past. The catalyst for this commentary was a *New Review* series on 'Socialism' published the previous month: William Morris had written on socialism and 'Art,' Bernard Shaw on 'Politics,' and Henry Salt, a Fabian journalist and founder of the Humanitarian League, on 'Literature.'[34] It was the last of these with which the *National Observer* took umbrage. In his article, Salt had argued that under the 'inevitable' 'Socialist future,' 'pure literature'—that is, the '*belles lettres* and the ornamental departments of writing' penned by leisured gentlemen—and the 'special class of professional critics' that validated it would cease to exist; that is, 'pure literature' would become 'a mockery and a sham' once society recognised it as 'the voice of class

[34] William Morris, 'I.--Art,' *The New Review* 4, no. 20 (January 1891), 1-8; G. Bernard Shaw, 'II.--Politics,' *The New Review* 4, no. 20 (January 1891), 9-18.

supremacy and not of a nation's life,' and '"culture"' as 'a hideous substructure of degradation and suffering.'[35]

In 'The Future of Literature,' the *National Observer* critic targeted Salt as the 'most amusing' 'professional Socialist' to perform in the recent *New Review* pantomime. Quoting Salt's article, the *National Observer* reviewer sarcastically paraphrased that once you get Socialism in action, 'you get "an end to the existence of a self-appointed literary class," except, it may be, where "the possession of real talent"—as in the case of persons born with the strawberry mark of Fabianism—gives "promise of public utility."'[36] There is a note both of instrumentalism and hypocrisy to this charge: Salt belonged to the 'self-appointed' (read, illegitimate) 'literary class' he was ostensibly chastising, but validated his own position with the equally dubious qualification, the 'strawberry mark of Fabianism.' As seen in the previous section, the Fabian Society at this time was popularly associated with its literate strategies—lectures, *Essays*, articles in the press—and its 'academic and literary' membership: accordingly, 'Fabianism' registered for Henley's 'purist' circle as a symbol of a politicised, professionalised, and feminised 'literary class' associated with Salt, Shaw, Allen, and William Morris, and which sought to bring 'literature' to account.

In a second article, entitled 'The Drama of the Future' published in June that year, the *National Observer* made a comparable use of the implications of 'Fabianism' for the literary field, but this time in relation to English drama. If the threat to the 'future of literature' was utilitarianism, for the 'drama of the future' it was commercialism. This time, the reviewer had a different Fabian writer in his sights, Grant Allen. Allen exemplified the commercial or popular writer whose work was anathema to Henley's 'Republic of Letters,' and was therefore seen as the natural antagonist to Henley's own

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[35] H. S. Salt, 'III.-- Literature,' *The New Review* 4, no. 20 (January 1891), 19-28 (23, 25).
[36] 'The Future of Literature,' *The National Observer* 5, no. 111 (January 1891), 166-67 (167).

role. We saw in Chapter 1 that in February that year, Allen had described the Fabians to readers of the *Fortnightly* as 'mostly art-critics, designers, musicians, men of letters,' a characterisation that would have galled Henley's sense of his and Allen's relative positions in the field.[37] In a second *Fortnightly* article entitled 'Letters in Philistia,' Allen singled Henley out for misconstruing the pressures placed on the 'literary artist' by the conditions of the English market:

> Mr. W. E. Henley, that acute and clever critic, once did a minor writer [to wit, Allen himself] the honour to describe him, in blushing print, as 'the man who isn't allowed.' With sharp prods of his keen pen, Mr. Henley made much fun of his temporary victim, for complaining of these artificial limits imposed on modern English literature by the respectable classes.[38]

Through such articles, Henley and Allen engaged in a professional struggle to claim the post of 'man of letters,' and the right to interpret and to dominate the literary field. Allen, as a self-professed 'literary artist,' sidelined Henley as a 'critic,' a second order function less authorised to adjudicate questions of literary 'genius' and value.

Henley's literary journal responded with an exposition of the degradation of English theatre filtered through an *ad hominem* attack on Allen in 'The Drama of the Future,' and a highly gendered reaction against the 'Girtonians' with whom Allen shared the stage. The old 'superstition' that 'aspirants' of the drama required 'a special training' and 'theatrical temperament'—to wit, 'genius'—was disappearing, the critic observed, as a new 'fashion' took hold of London. The critical criterion of this 'school of drama' 'is not, Can you act? but Can you think?' Grant Allen is its manager, Ibsenism its repertoire, and 'young ladies from Cambridge' its troupe. On the prospects of this 'drama of the future,' the literary critic advised: 'a "thinking theatre" might be run on a very small capital, and in an age when Fabianism and Celticism flourish would ensure support. Mr. Grant Allen, in collaboration with Girton, is ready to run the show. Surely there will be

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[37] Allen, 'The Celt in English Art,' 273.
[38] Grant Allen, 'Letters in Philistia,' *Fortnightly Review* 49, no. 394 (1 June 1891), 947-62 (953).

no difficulty in getting the money?'[39] By casting Allen as a commercial writer motivated by material interests, and the director of a chorus of trumped-up 'Girtonians,' the *National Observer* again evoked the reductive binary between 'pure' literature and the market; and between a consecrated masculine 'genius'—the 'men of letters'—and illegitimate, feminine and feminised 'aspirants.' The *National Observer* used 'Fabianism' in this second polemic as a condition of existence amenable to the proliferation of 'popular' or commercial writers such as Grant Allen, and 'New Woman' novelists, like Allen's fictional Herminia Barton and real-life Fabian Emma Brooke, writers who 'scorned passion and construction,' and *used* literature as a vehicle for 'intellectual discussion' and challenging social *mores* rather than for the purification of principles of legitimacy.

In both *National Observer* pieces, the literary critic rejoined specific articles that Fabian writers had contributed to the press, articles not treating 'political' questions *per se*, but the idea of socialism as one of the conditions of existence then transforming English life. Grant Allen's 'The Celt in English Art,' and 'Letters in Philistia,' and Henry Salt's 'Literature' attempted to conceptualise the ramifications for the English literary market, and the writer, (re)organised under a socialist state. These were not isolated incidents, however, but particular manifestations of a broader current towards radical politics and the arts. Allen's 'Celt in English Art,' in which he nominated Oscar Wilde and William Morris as avatars of the artistic and political confluence of radical 'Celticism,' appeared in the same *Fortnightly Review* issue as Wilde's own 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism.' Here, Wilde made comparable arguments about the impact of the 'Philistine' English market on the writer, particularly the novelist (*'Now Art should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic'*), and the observation that the work

[39] 'The Drama of the Future,' *The National Observer* 6, no. 136 (June 1891), 136-37 (137).

of men of 'genius,' specifically Ruskin and Darwin, had been facilitated by private means, freeing them from the 'clamorous claims' of the 'popular' market.[40] According to Shaw's biographer Michael Holroyd, Wilde 'let it be known' that the inspiration for his own exposition on socialism and the arts was Bernard Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, published in monograph form in 1891 but first delivered at St. James' Restaurant in London on 18 July 1890 as the opening lecture for the Fabian summer series on 'Socialism in Contemporary Literature.'[41] Subsequent lecturers in this Fabian season included the Russian exile Sergei Stepniak, who presented on modern Russian fiction, Hubert Bland on socialist novels, Sydney Olivier on Émile Zola, and William Morris on Gothic architecture. In the early 1890s, this small but influential community of writers—many of whom were associated with the Fabian Society, all of whom were London-based—were exploring ideas about the 'writer' and the market through lecture series and debates, and in the periodical press, particularly through organs like the *Fortnightly Review* under Frank Harris's progressive editorship. Through this new literary community, the masculine, individual genius—the 'man of letters'—was under threat from a new emphasis on the conditions and social production of the work of art itself as a vehicle or instrument in progressive thought. 'Fabianism,' like 'Celticism,' supplied Henley's circle's need for a synecdoche through which to evoke, and discredit, this whole intellectual atmosphere, associated with effeminacy, utilitarianism, and commercialism. 'Fabianism' did not symbolise for the 'Henley Regatta' the 'principles and doctrines' of the Fabian Society, that is, but a position in the field that was aligned with certain ways of thinking about the writer in relation to the market, and the *uses* of literature in

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[40] Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism,' *Fortnightly Review* 49, no. 340 (February 1891), 292-319 (305).
[41] Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw. Vol. 1, 1856-1898 : The Search for Love*, revised ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), 197-8; and Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw. Vol. 3, 1918-1950 : the lure of fantasy* (London: Penguin, 1993), 191.

imagining an alternative to the social and political *status quo* that was contrary to their own.

In both articles, too, the *National Observer* associated 'Fabianism' with the 'future' state of literature. In part, this was contiguous with Salt's original article on the inevitability of socialism and Allen's view of the 'Celtic' transformation. It also, however, corroborated the contemporary sense that 'Fabianism' was a manifestation of the 'new' wave washing over the 1890s. As Holbrook Jackson, who himself joined the Fabian Society in 1907, wrote in his intellectual history of the decade that was 'so conscious of its own novelty and originality,' the 'adjective "new"' conferred throughout the 1890s 'extreme modernity' upon 'the ideas of the whole period.'[42] As 'an indicator of popular consciousness of what was happening,' the 'adjective "new"' was 'applied indifferently to all kinds of human activity, from art and morals to humour and Trade Unionism.'[43] 'Fabianism,' with its associations with the 'New Woman,' the 'New Socialism,' and the 'New Theatre,' in this sense also enacted the tension between the 'new' or aspiring modernity and a consecrated or pre-existing cultural elite. As one commentator for the *Magazine of Music* in 1893 wrote of Henley, 'Mr. Henley applies the word "new" to anything or anyone he holds in especial abhorrence.' He is the natural enemy, therefore, not only of Grant Allen but also of the 'newer' of the 'new' critics, 'George Bernard Shaw, socialist, vegetarian, humanitarian, economist, art critic, musical critic, and playwright,' and 'one of the founders of the Fabian Society.'[44] Henley, who relocated the premises of the *National Observer* from Edinburgh to London in 1892 in order to participate in the literary London of which the Fabians were a prevalent feature, recognised this 'new,' literary community as a rival to his own literary values.

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[42] Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 21-22.
[43] Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 27.
[44] 'Musical Criticism, 'Old' and 'New',' *The Magazine of Music* 10, no. 7 (1893), 151-53 (151, 153).

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As one of the progressive 'ideas' imbued with the 'novelty' characteristic of the 1890s, 'Fabianism' was popularly associated with a suite of 'new' manifestations from across the range of 'human activity.' Conservative critics—both in the sense of the defenders of the establishment, and affiliates of the Tory party—treated it in this context, as fad or a transient 'craze' that was at best an intellectual *curio*, at worst a symptom of a broader current away from the values of the English tradition. William Hodgson, for instance, writing in the conservative *National Review* in October 1891, articulated the sense in which this culture of the 'new,' despite its diverse manifestations, was motivated, and given shape, by a relatively homogeneous and influential subset of English society. Taking as exemplary the popular interest throughout the 1880s and 1890s in Buddhist spiritualism, or Theosophy, of which the Fabian Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky were prominent leaders, Hodgson observed,

> The men and women whose enthusiasm constitutes 'the Mahatma Boom' belong to a definite class. They are the persons who successively 'boomed' Agnosticism, Positivism, Salvationism, and Fabianism. They have all the other modernisms, such as, in theory at least, Vegetarianism, Teetotalism, the Puritanism of Tolstoi, and Ibsenism as well.[45]

Anticipating the rhetoric of rupture found in the 'literary modernists'' polemic from the 1910s, Hodgson wrote that the '*fin de siècle*' had about it the 'atmosphere of a languid summer suddenly reconstituted by a sudden thunderstorm,' with these 'modernisms'—'Fabianism,' vegetarianism, Agnosticism, and so forth—as the outward signs of change. Returning to his theme in a fictional dialogue (an increasingly superannuated periodical genre popular among Victorian 'men of letters') published in the *National Review* in 1893, Hodgson reiterated this sense of the modernity of 'Fabianism' as embedded in the broader currents of change:

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[45] William Earl Hodgson, 'The Mahatma Period,' *The National Review* 18, no. 104 (October 1891), 189-200 (192).

> We are all interested in the intellectual movements we scoff at—Fabianism, the New Humour, the New Art in Story-Writing, the New Puritanism, the New Paganism, and all the rest of it. The only difference is that the New people themselves are serious while we hide our seriousness in a jest.[46]

Hodgson could not quarantine 'Fabianism,' as Henley had attempted to do, because he recognised the public's interest (albeit closeted) in it as one of the many 'modernisms' donned by the 'New people,' such as Bernard Shaw and Grant Allen. Instead, he contained it by emphasising its transience: like a 'squib,' to borrow a term from the *Speaker*, novelty quickly expires. Bust will follow the 'boom.' No more enduring or necessary than the 'New Art in Story-Writing' or Tolstoy's 'New Puritanism,' 'Fabianism' would, Hodgson argued, go the way of many an 'intellectual movement' in contemporary art and literature as the 'apostles of each new craze' transferred their capricious energies elsewhere.

Hodgson's association of 'Fabianism' with the 'other modernisms' of 'Ibsenism,' 'Vegetarianism,' and the 'New Humour' was only possible because of Bernard Shaw's reputation as a prominent Fabian. As the *Magazine of Music* article indicated, through his manifestos and lectures, his music and dramatic criticism, and from 1893 his plays, Shaw became a public figurehead for the popular perception of the Society as a cultural actor with stakes in music criticism and literature, as much in socialist advocacy. Alice Stronach, a Newnham graduate and 'New Woman' journalist, took this popular association to its logical conclusion, claiming in the *Windsor Magazine* in 1896, that 'to readers of novels and newspapers, Fabianism has come to connote a lanky personage, with pale, cynical, yet kindly face, naïve self-conceit, brilliant wit, a weakness for snuff-coloured woollen garments and for vegetarianism, and a trick of writing brilliant plays.'[47] In case the nuance of her desired connotation was missed, Stronach outlined for

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[46] William Earl Hodgson, 'A Modern Conversation,' *The National Review* 21, no. 125 (1893), 594-605 (597).
[47] Stronach, 'Socialist Leaders of To-Day,' 622.

readers the importance of Shaw's periodical criticism for the Society's popular reputation:

> Indeed in certain quarters—and women novelists are mainly responsible for it—socialism, or at least Fabianism, and Shaw have come to be regarded as almost synonymous terms. Shaw himself is partly to blame, for in his writings, whether in book reviews, in musical criticism for the *Star*, in art criticism for the *World*, in dramatic critiques for the *Saturday Review*, socialism and Shaw have invariably been his topic.[48]

Stronach's proposed synonymy between 'Fabianism' and Shavianism both confirmed one aspect of the range of cultural associations discussed above, and introduced a new consideration. Not only was 'Fabianism' inextricably linked, for 'readers of novels and newspapers,' with literary, musical, and art criticism, that is, but this association may be attributed to the works of a small group of 'literary Fabian women' working for the Executive and auxiliary committees.[49] Despite the Society's conspicuous silence on the question of women's suffrage, Stronach remarked on the influence of three such 'literary' women on the Fabian Executive: Emma Brooke, author of *A Superfluous Woman* (1894) and *Transition* (1895); Honnor Morten, 'a lecturer as well as a writer'; and Miss Priestly, a 'journalist.' Other 'literary' women not on the Executive but active in other areas of the Society included Mrs. Hubert Bland, 'known in literature as E. Nesbit, poet and story writer,' Constance Garnett, translator of Russian literature, and Annie Besant, renowned orator. The legacy of these 'literary Fabian women,' while certainly motivating the anxieties revealed in the *National Observer* polemic against 'Fabianism,' has been almost entirely overlooked in canonical accounts of the Society's early history, and shall be explored throughout Part 2 of this thesis.

By opening up 'Fabianism' to the methods of cultural history, therefore, we can recover a range of contexts in which the metonymy was evoked in public debates as one of the 'modernisms' transforming intellectual life in England at the turn of the twentieth

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[48] Stronach, 'Socialist Leaders of To-Day,' 621.
[49] Stronach, 'Socialist Leaders of To-Day,' 619.

century. 'Fabianism' symbolised a diverse set of cultural and literary coordinates appropriate to the progressive 'class' of the 1890s, and not, or not exclusively, the 'doctrines and principles of the Fabian Society.' The Fabians featured in these debates as representatives of the 'New People' responsible for the propagation and imagination of the 'New woman,' the 'drama of the future,' and the 'New Socialism,' as well as the 'modern' professional classes—the 'brain-worker,' the 'journalist,' and the 'intellectual'—who embodied for the 'popular consciousness' the qualities of this 'extreme modernity.'

'Fabianism' and the Literary *Avant-Garde*

Between the early 1890s and the 1920s, the 'indeterminateness' and extra-political connotations that characterised the Society's early reception were reduced to a canonised, single-story of 'Fabianism.' The institutionalisation of a 'highly selective' version of 'modernism' precipitated, by necessity, a comparably selective version of 'Fabianism' stripped of its cultural and literary resonances.[50] From an anomalous body approximating something between 'a literary' and a 'mutual elevation society' hovering precariously in the space between politics, culture, and society, or one of the 'intellectual movements' or 'modernisms,' like Celticism, vegetarianism, or Ibsenism, that channelled the progressive currents of the 1890s, the Fabian Society and 'Fabianism' came to be construed as strictly economic and political in function.

The mechanism motivating this *volta* in the reception of 'Fabianism' was anticipated by reviews such as Crozier's. It was because the Fabians' influence within politics was asserted from their *a priori* reputation as writers, journalists, and 'intellectuals' that they registered on the radar of other groups and individuals with

[50] Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, 35.

interests vested in the cultural, and specifically literary, field. If Henley's 'Regatta' of the 1890s was the first, it was not the last literary *avant-garde* to identify the Fabians as cultural rivals. We can see in the 'literary modernists'' records the gradual stripping away of the Society's cultural and literary connotations, and the consequent codification of the more literalist definition of 'Fabianism' as it is recorded in the OED today.

As Ann Ardis argues in *Modernism and Cultural Conflict* (2002), the emerging 'literary modernists' of the 1910s, specifically Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis, 'positioned themselves antithetically' to the Fabians when asserting their own modernity. Citing key modernist texts, such as Ezra Pound's essay 'The Serious Artist' (1913), and Woolf's early novels and essays, Ardis showed how these aspiring younger writers had the Fabians firmly in their sights when articulating their own entry into the literary field. To illustrate her point, Ardis quotes a letter that Virginia Woolf sent to her tutor Janet Case, one of the first female graduates of Girton College, in 1922. In this excerpt, also found in Ruth Livesey's *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism* (2007) where it was used to opposite effect, Woolf related to Case an argument she had had with her husband Leonard Woolf, who was one of the Fabian Society's leading lights during the First World War:

> We've been sitting in the Park and listening to the Band and having a terrific argument about Shaw. Leonard says we owe a great deal to Shaw. I say that he only influenced the outer fringe of morality. Leonard says that the shop girls wouldn't be listening to the Band with their young men if it weren't for Shaw. I say the human heart is only touched by poets. Leonard says rot, I say damn. Then we go home. Leonard says I'm narrow. I say he's stunted. But don't you agree with me that the Edwardians, from 1895 to 1914, made a pretty poor show. By the Edwardians, I mean Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, the Webbs, Arnold Bennett. We Georgians have our work cut out for us, you see. There's not a single living writer (English) I respect: so you see, I have to read Russian: but here I must stop. I just throw this out to you to think about, under the trees. How does one come by one's morality? Surely by reading the poets. And we've got no poets. Does that throw light upon anything? Consider the Webbs—That woman has the impertinence to say that I'm amoral: the truth being if Mrs Webb had been a good woman, Mrs Woolf would have been a better. Orphans is what I say we are—we Georgians—but I must stop.[51]

Woolf's paradox—blaming Beatrice Webb for her own moral limitations in the same breath as declaring herself an 'orphan'—enacts the paradox of denunciation: to assert the Fabians' irrelevance, the emerging *avant-garde* implicitly had to acknowledge otherwise. Woolf enacted the kind of free-floating negation, or unqualified denunciation, of the Fabians that was common to modernist polemic. We can hear in Woolf's defence of the 'poets' echoes of Terence Hewet's appeal to Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out* (1915): 'read poetry, Rachel, poetry, poetry, poetry!' There is no place for 'antiquated problem plays, [or] harrowing depictions of life in the east end' in Virginia Woolf's 'Georgian' library.[52] The irony of Woolf's self-conscious preference for 'the Russians' over Shaw's Fabian generation—we know from 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' that she believed 'Constance Garnett's translations were a crucial influence' on the English novel—was that she would have been reading English translations of Tolstoy and Turgenev by Fabian socialists Constance Garnett and Aylmer Maude, as is explored in Chapter 5.[53]

Woolf's polemic was driven by the logic of the field. Like Henley in the 1890s, Woolf evoked the reductive binaries of 'pure' *versus* instrumental, artistic *versus*

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[51] Virginia Woolf to Janet Case, 21 May 1922, in Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Vol.2, 529.
[52] Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: Hogarth Press, 1915), 358, quoted in Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, 1-2.
[53] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,' *Nation* 34(1923), 342.

partisan, poetic *versus* economic to inculcate new binaries implicating the Fabians: 'Georgian' versus 'Edwardian,' modernist versus Fabian. For Ardis, such attempts to 'liminaliz[e] the Fabians as 'poetry-blind,' 'fiction-blind, and drama-blind' according to these binaries revealed a profound anxiety about the professionalization of the literary and cultural field.[54] The Fabians were 'bludgeoned publicly because they epitomize[d] the ethos of professionalism with which literary artists such as Pound were struggling to come to terms in the early twentieth century.'[55] We have seen already the *National Observer* critic's hostility towards the 'professional,' Fabian literary critic in the early 1890s. A further example inherited by the *avant-garde* of the 1910s is found in the first (and penultimate) issue of *Blast*, in which Wyndham Lewis blasted the 'specialist,' the '"professional,"' and the 'journalist' alongside 'Sydney Webb' [sic] and Annie Besant.[56] Lewis targeted a category—modern professionals—without which the Fabians would not have been possible. As seen above, 'modern' professionals—'journalists,' civil servants, 'socialists,' and 'intellectuals'—not only founded the Society, but shaped its popular reception, and ensured the Society's survival amongst the many other, and shorter lived, reform organisations of the late nineteenth century. As seen in the debates between Grant Allen and W. E. Henley, it was this professionalization, and its consequent displacement of established categories such as the 'man of letters,' the 'literary class,' and the 'artistic genius' that made the Fabians vulnerable to two generations of literary *avant-garde.*

The 'literary modernists' used this atmosphere of professionalization to simplify all indeterminacy, and to strip the Fabians of any 'authority among the cultivated' that they once enjoyed. As one correspondent to the *New Age* wrote in 1907, 'the Fabian

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[54] Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, 40.
[55] Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, 31.
[56] Wyndham Lewis, 'Manifesto,' *Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex* 1, no. 1 (20 June 1914), 1-160 (41).

Society […] is either a society of economic experts or nothing worth taking account of.'[57] This either/or binary was shaped by the same logic that underpinned Henley's pure/commercial and the 'inside/outside politics' rationalisations from the 1890s and early 1900s, and was a recurrent strategy in the younger generation of writers' attempts to assert their own identity. The student of literature must beware such free-floating negations, or the presentation of one side of this binary—the Fabians as jejune, anti-aesthetic, 'economic'—without the alternative history in mind.

Unqualified depictions of the Fabians as jejune, 'elderly,' or anti-aesthetic abound in the literary journals favoured by the modernists, inscribing one side of this kind of self-positioning. An instructive example is found in a 1911 article entitled 'Feminism and Propagandist Drama,' published in Dora Marsden's modernist journal *The Freewoman* (the precursor to the *New Freewoman* in which Pound's two-part essay 'The Serious Artist' appeared two years later). Here, theatre reviewer G. L. Harding wrote in terms suggestive of the rhetoric of rupture found in William Hodgson's 1893 review, that 'never was a large civilised community, either artistic or politically, more conscious of itself than is ours to-day.' Harding positioned this self-conscious community antithetically to the Fabians: 'our interest in remedying the ills of the State goes far beyond the Thirty-nine Articles of an unromantic Fabianism.'[58] This is a denunciation not of type, but degree: the feminist dramatists' political 'interest' is more comprehensive than the 'unromantic' Fabians of the 'thinking theatre' that preceded them. Embedded in this denunciation, but not acknowledged, is the Fabians' prior authority within 'propagandist drama,' their association with the idea of the 'New

[57] Charles Whitby, 'Medical Education ' *The New Age* 2, no. 9 (28 December 1907), 179.
[58] G. L. Harding, 'Feminism and the Propagandist Drama,' *The Freewoman* 1, no. 4 (14 December 1911), 76-78 (77).

Woman,' and their reputation with the 'thinking-theatre' and the 'Girtonians' in the 1890s.

As this *Freewoman* article suggests, the 'literary modernists' transferred the debate from the mainstream periodical press—which we have seen above was vital for the popularisation of the Fabians' own self-understanding among the British public—to the more 'restricted' space of the literary journals and novels through which modernism came into being. Ezra Pound, for instance, used *The New Freewoman*, the *New Age* (with its own conferral of modernity through the adjective 'new') and other literary journals to broadcast his struggle to reclaim the right to adjudicate questions of literary merit from the Fabian 'professionals.' The best-known example is of course from Pound's essay, 'The Serious Artist': 'we are asked to define the relation of the arts to economics, we are asked what position the arts are to hold in the ideal republic. And it is obviously the opinion of many people less objectionable than the Sydney [sic] Webbs that the arts had better not exist at all.'[59] The *Little Review*, 'a magazine of the arts, making no compromise with the public taste,' provided another such platform. In an article entitled 'Our Contemporaries,' published in July 1918 while Britain was still at war, Pound wrote with loaded Germanic overtones that 'the sum of these fabian [sic] crankest unhumanizing kulturbunds' is that 'man is a unit to be dealt with via committees.' 'Christ,' he continued, 'with his embarrassing question regarding the value of the individual soul, has died in vain, etc.'[60] Pound's rhetoric dehumanised the Fabians, delegitimizing their claims to English authority by both associating them with England's enemy, and presenting them as hostile to English literary and liberal culture. And again, in an article 'Economic Democracy' published in 1920, 'for two decades the intelligentsia

[59] Ezra Pound, 'II. The Serious Artist,' *The New Freewoman: an individualist review* 1, no. 9 (15 October 1913), 161-80 (161).
[60] Ezra Pound, 'Our Contemporaries,' *Little Review: a magazine of the arts, making no compromise with the public taste* 5, no. 3 (July 1918) 35-37 (36).

has made its own brand of poison, the Fabians and persons of Webbian temperament have put forward the ideal: man as a social unit.'[61] Pounds rhetoric recalled Henley's vehement individualism, which was itself an effort to define a public vocation, the 'man of letters.' By treating man as a 'social unit,' the Fabians threatened the driving force of English literary culture: the individual genius, the artist, and the 'man of letters.' Among the self-consciously anti-popular readership of the literary *Little Review*, as for these other 'modernist' titles, Pound's caricature of the bureaucratic Fabian and 'Fabianism,' stripped of their previous 'authority among the cultivated,' became a convenient scapegoat as the antithesis of their own self-understanding: economistic, technocratic, and toxic.

The younger writers also dramatised this struggle within the pages of the modernist novel. In *Jacob's Room* (1922), Woolf's first narratologically experimental novel, Woolf dramatised her self-positioning by focalising this antagonism with the 'elderly' Fabians through Jacob Flanders, a Cambridge undergraduate enlisted to the First World War. When Jacob visited his tutor Mr. Plumer at home, Woolf gave the reader a snapshot of the 'boring' and 'unnecessary' Fabian literary output popular among academics of the pre-war generation:

> Books were on [Plumer's] shelves by Wells and Shaw; on the table serious sixpenny weeklies written by pale men in muddy boots—the weekly creak and screech of brains rinsed in cold water and wrung dry—melancholy papers.' [...] 'Bloody beastly,' he said to Timmy Durrant, summing up his discomfort at the world shown him at lunch-time, a world capable of existing—there was no doubt about that—but so unnecessary, such a thing to believe in—Shaw and Wells and the serious sixpenny weeklies! What were they after, scrubbing and demolishing, these elderly people? Had they never read Homer, Shakespeare, the Elizabethans?[62]

The fictionalised Cambridge of *Jacob's Room* mapped onto the lived Cambridge of the Fabian Apostles Hugh Dalton and Rupert Brooke: Cambridge, that is, before the First World War, when 'Fabianism was at its high tide.' Like Henley in the early 1890s, Woolf

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[61] Pound, 'Economic Democracy,' 1-64 (40).
[62] Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 33.

read this Fabian high-water mark in the field she aspired to enter (indeed, Brooke was president of the Cambridge Fabian Society and delivered a lecture on 'Democracy and the Arts' in 1910), and sought to quarantine it accordingly. Orphaning the 'Georgians' was one such strategy for denying the Fabians'—Shaw, Bennett, the Webbs—influence over the next generation of writers. Arnold Bennett's famous review of *Jacob's Room* continued these literary 'struggles,' cast by Woolf as generational 'struggles,' into the periodical press.

The legacy of the 'literary modernists' demonstrates, with Dominick LaCapra, how institutions and 'social formations' shape the judgement of 'texts' for other communities of readers.[63] The institutionalisation of 'Cambridge English' from the 1920s ensured the survival of the 'literary modernist' interpretation of 'Fabianism.' Particularly by transferring the debate from the pages of the periodical press (which as we saw above, particularly in Stronach's review, was vital to the Fabians' public performance) to the pages of the (modernist) novel and the literary journal, the 'literary modernists' succeeded where Henley could not, in relocating the struggle to define 'Fabianism' from the familiar space of Fabian lectures, periodical pieces, and 'popular' writing, to the restricted space of 'pure' literature. While the one has survived in the libraries, lectures, and curricula of the universities, the other—until the rise of 'cultural studies' and increasing interest in periodical culture—was relegated from the discipline of 'English literature.' This chapter has shown the afterlife of the 1890s, bringing it together with the so-called 'modernist moment.' Historicised alongside the Fabian Society's reputation as practically 'a literary society' associated with progressive thought and literature in the 1890s, Ezra Pound's famous clarion call to 'make it new'

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[63] LaCapra, *History & Criticism*, 129.

betrays an anxiety that speaks to their 'struggles' within the field for the right to adjudicate artistic and literary values.

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Part 1 has begun the task of historicising and contextualising Marxist and 'literary modernist' polemic that targeted the early Fabians and 'Fabianism.' By investigating the broader discursive field in which 'Fabianism,' a fluid metonymy and not a stable referent, was 'read, used, and abused' by a range of individuals and groups with interests vested in claiming the role of adjudicators of political and cultural issues, we have seen how 'Fabianism' in fact embodied a range of literary and cultural values. 'Fabianism' was received by contemporaries as one of the 'modernisms,' such as 'Ibsenism,' or 'vegetarianism,' or the 'Puritanism of Tolstoy,' that were transforming British life; the Fabian Society itself was likened to a 'literary society' composed of progressive 'intellectuals,' 'academics,' and 'writers'; and both represented, or rather were construed as, a threat to the driving forces of 'pure' literary culture by presenting an alternative understanding of the social value and function of literature.

Armed with this broader, revised understanding of the range of meanings 'Fabianism' held for British commentators at the turn of the twentieth century, we can proceed, in Part 2, to deepening our understanding of how these cultural associations came into being. The three chapters of Part 2 are organised around key ideas, themes, or orthodoxies associated with the Fabians that emerged from Part 1: namely, that they were 'bureaucratic,' or 'administrative' socialists, uninterested in human values (Chapter 3); that they were leaders of the 'thinking-theatre' which threatened 'pure' literary culture in the 1890s and early 1900s (Chapter 4); and that they were exponents of a distinctively 'English' form of thought, and were unengaged with international

communities or questions of culture beyond their limited London-based circles (Chapter 5).

Two ideas recur throughout these reconsiderations. First, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Fabians were popularly associated as 'intellectuals,' writers, and political thinkers with the 'new' in its various expressions, from the 'new woman,' 'new socialism,' and the 'new theatre' we have already encountered, to the 'new journalism,' and even 'new teaching' and 'new internationalism.' Second, in their effort to articulate a public vocation for the Fabian 'intellectual' that navigated the dual demands of autonomy, or the right to think beyond the logic of political doctrine, and the authority—and duty—to intervene in questions of general interest, the Fabians allied themselves, explicitly and implicitly, with the precedent of Matthew Arnold.

Part 2 Reconsidering Some Orthodoxies of 'Fabianism'

3 'But What is the Very Best?': Matthew Arnold, the Fabians, and the Struggle for National Education

> I know that, since the Revolution, along with many dangerous, many useful powers of government have been weakened.[1]
>
> Edmund Burke, 'Present Discontents' (1770)

> [The Labour movement] demands for the students of all ages and classes, and for the teaching profession, the very best that the nation can give. But what is the very best, and how can it, in actual fact, be given?[2]
>
> Sidney Webb, 'The Teacher in Politics,' Fabian tract 187 (1918)

Matthew Arnold prefaced 'Democracy,' published first as the introduction to *The Popular Education of France* in 1860 and subsequently as an essay in 1879, with a qualified affirmation of State intervention attributed to the Irish Whig politician and philosopher Edmund Burke: '"I know that, since the Revolution, along with many dangerous, many useful powers of Government have been weakened."'[3] In so doing, Arnold prepared his implied reader—the instinctively liberal Englishman—for his argument that the State could and should assume responsibility for elementary education. While the 1870 Education Act, colloquially known as Forster's Act after the Liberal MP who tabled the Bill, realised to some degree Arnold's vision for a system of public education in England, it simultaneously initiated a labyrinthine legislative framework that would culminate in the 1890s in the prevailing sense among educationalists that the system was in a state of crisis. The newspapers of the day registered this anxiety, with articles decrying the

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[1] Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, collected in three volumes* (London: J Dodsley, 1792 http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW3305721008&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE) Vol.1, 465 1 September 2014. Digitised monograph

[2] Sidney Webb, *The Teacher in Politics*, vol. 187, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, 1918), 10.

[3] 'Introduction: Democracy,' in Arnold, *Democratic Education*, 3.

'education fiasco,' 'modern mis-education,' 'the education problem,' 'the education folly,' and so forth featuring in education supplements and regular columns alike.[4]

Conventionally, historians of Britain's education system construe this 'problem' as largely administrative and political.[5] From Francis Adams's seminal *The History of the Elementary School Contest in England* (1882), which detailed the 'struggle for National Education' culminating in the Forster's Act, through to the Blackwell *Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2004), edited by Chris Williams, these histories tend to measure the progress of British education through the legislative milestones marking the nineteenth-century road towards the provision of public education: the familiar pit-stops of 1862 (The Revised Code), 1868 (Taunton Report), 1870 (Forster's Act), 1880 and 1891 (Elementary Education Acts), 1896 (Gorst's failed Bill), 1899 (Board of Education Act), 1902 to 1903 (Balfour's Education Acts) and so forth provide the material and the parameters of the narrative.[6]

When we broaden our scope from the political to the cultural documents from this period, however, it becomes evident that the administrative facet of the 'education problem' at the turn of the century was part of a much wider cultural conversation about what education was, or should be. In Sidney Webb's formula, the education equation to be solved was two-fold: 'what is the very best, and how, in actual fact, may it be given?'

This chapter examines the Fabians' participation in both sides of this debate within the context of this larger conversation. While their contribution to (for many,

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[4] 'The Education Muddle,' *The Speaker* 14(1896), 484-85; 'The Education Fiasco,' *The Review of Reviews* 14(1896), 44; Edmond Fitzmaurice, 'The Education Question,' *The Speaker* (1901), 102-04; Balliol Master, 'The Education Question (iii),' *The English Review* (1917), 51-57.

[5] W. B. Stephens, *Education in Britain, 1750-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

[6] See Philip Gardiner, 'Education, Learning, Literacy,' in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004 http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/uid=3/book?show=all&id=g9780631225799_9780631225799) 12 July 2014. Electronic book

complicity with) the Conservative Government's legislative response to the 'fiasco'—the Education Act of 1902 and the Education (London) Act of 1903—frequently provides chapter fodder for Labour and Fabian historians alike, the Arnoldian resonances of the symbolic side of the problem have long been overlooked. As we shall see below, the Fabians were aware of and consciously capitalised on the cultural authority to be won by aligning their own coordinates in the debate with those charted by Matthew Arnold in the 1860s and 1870s.

Such an examination also provides an opportunity for re-evaluating the enduring charges of cultural elitism levelled at Matthew Arnold.[7] Describing Arnold as 'preternaturally sensitive to the needs of his social class,' Terry Eagleton sets the tone of the kind of criticism generated by scholars associated with the Birmingham school when he writes of Arnold that he sought to '"Hellenize"' the 'philistine middle class' by 'transfusing into them something of the traditional style of the aristocracy.'[8] In his recent *biographia literaria*, for instance, John Carey filtered this accusation through the alembic of his own experience as a reader: 'as a thinker, Arnold is at best useless and at worst malign. Every thought that comes to him is drenched in the assumptions of his social class.'[9] Using selective, damning quotations—for example, Arnold's description of John Keats' love letters as 'underbred and ignoble'—Carey reiterates an interpretation that owes much to the criticism of thinkers like Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and Terry Eagleton.

In recent scholarship, however, many academics have challenged this predominant doxa. Helen Small, for instance, in *The Value of the Humanities* (2013), argues that 'Arnold's defence of culture has a subtler and more complex relationship to

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[7] Core texts from this school include Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* , Williams, *Culture and Society*, and Terry Eagleton, *Literary theory : an introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).
[8] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 21.
[9] John Carey, *The Unexpected Professor: an Oxford life in books* (London Faber and Faber, 2014), 222-23.

the notion of usefulness than its common and casual description as "anti-utilitarian" allows for.' Arnold was not, Small points out, 'anti-statist,' and believed in fact that the State ought to assume responsibility for the provision and assessment of elementary education.[10] While Carey dismisses such 'academics' who 'optimistically' evoke Arnold to endorse their protests against '[the British] government's cuts in arts funding for universities' as 'wrong-headed,' the legacy of Arnold's ideal of the State as 'centre of light and authority' that could, and should, be an organ of 'the best that has been thought and said' has survived through institutions such as the BBC, the National Trust, and the Arts Council.[11] This chapter participates in this latter, revisionist tendency, reconsidering Arnold's place, alongside that of the Fabians, in the British cultural tradition.

Politics and Education

> Our educational machinery in England has got into a notable mess.[12]
>
> Sidney Webb, 'The Education Muddle and the Way Out,' Fabian Tract (1901)

In his diagnosis of the 'notable mess' into which the 'educational machinery' of England had fallen, Sidney Webb expressed a view prevalent among the educationalists of the day. By 'machinery,' Webb used a term common to the debate indicating the legislative and institutional frameworks through which the various 'grades'—elementary, secondary, and university—and 'types'—technical, artistic, and literary—of education in England were delivered. The Education Act of 1870 had established the School Boards, engineered to 'fill the gaps' left by the absence of public schools in certain counties and boroughs, and to bring existing public schools under one administrative authority.

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[10] Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199683864.001.0001) 70-71 23 June 2014. Electronic book
[11] Carey, *The Unexpected Professor*, 222. See, for instance, Robert Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the transformation of modernity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 49-50.
[12] Sidney Webb, *The Education Muddle and the Way Out: a constructive criticism of English educational machinery*, vol. 106, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, January 1901), 3.

These school boards were directly elected, entirely independent of municipal government, and, under the 'Cowper-Temple clause,' wholly non-denominational. In 1888, however, the authority of the Board Schools was thrown into question when the Local Government Act provided for the establishment of elected councils for the counties and boroughs. The resultant overlapping of administrative duties precipitated the 'crisis' alluded to above.

As Harold Gorst (son of the Conservative Vice-President for the Education Council) observed, however, one difficulty that education reformers encountered was that 'for the vast majority of people,' this administrative 'blunder' was not sufficiently dire that they would accept that the 'entire system of education is totally wrong from beginning to end.'[13] It was the Cockerton Judgement of 1901 that intensified this polemic, generating the sense of urgency that Gorst felt lacking. The Judgement found that the School Boards' provision for 'higher grade' elementary schools, which catered for children over the age of twelve continuing within the system, was in fact illegal. As J. Fitch wrote for the *Nineteenth Century* in 1901, the social deficit produced by the legislation—the abolition of Board school education for children over the age of twelve—made the Judgement a matter of 'exceptional public interest.'[14] Many, including Fabian socialists, 'educationalists,' 'experts,' and politicians, vied for the authority to intervene in this matter of acute 'public interest.' The defining issues at stake were: what authority would cater for the capable graduate of the elementary school if the School Boards legally could not, and what would be the structural relationship and boundaries between these two authorities?

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[13] Harold E. Gorst, 'The Blunder of Modern Education,' *The Nineteenth Century* 49, no. 291 (May 1901), 843-48 (843).
[14] J. G. Fitch, 'The Higher Grade Board Schools,' *The Nineteenth Century* 49, no. 288 (1901), 321-31 (331).

To solve this administrative mess and assuage public demand for a better system for students of all ages, many educationalists from across the political spectrum called on legislators to simplify the education system of all 'grades' and 'types.' E. F. M. MacCarthy, a 'recognised authority on education,' summarised this movement for the Liberal *Speaker* in 1901, observing that 'the volume of opinion in favour of administrative unity, i.e. of one Local Authority for all kinds of education—elementary, secondary, and technical—has been growing apace.'[15] The challenge, however, consisted in *how* to institute a single administrative authority out of the overlapping and obscure structures that comprised the existing system. The School Boards, though administratively cumbersome and ineffective, had since the 1870s transformed the educational and hence social landscape of England, and had therefore acquired a kind of cultural status as an emblem of English modernity. While this cultural legacy was not universally lauded—we think for instance of Virginia Woolf's infamous dismissal of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) as the work of a 'callow board schoolboy'—supporters of the Boards could evoke this legacy of the democratic expansion of educational opportunities (the Elementary Education Acts of 1890 and 1891 made education compulsory and *gratis*, respectively) to resist the 'growing' calls to abolish the School Board system and aggregate its authority under the auspices of the newer County Councils, or an altogether new 'authority.'[16]

H. G. Wells accused the Fabians, in their unnecessary 'interference in the squabble over the conditions of teaching in popular schools,' of having transgressed the politics/socialism divide discussed in Part 1. For the majority of Fabians, however, the

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[15] Edmond Fitzmaurice, 'The Education Question,' *The Speaker* (1901), 102-04 (102); E. F. M. MacCarthy, 'A Better Way Out of the Education Muddle,' *The Speaker* (1901), 705-07 (705).
[16] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, 1977-1984*, 5 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1977) Vol.2, 199-200.

education 'crisis' was of utmost concern.[17] Graham Wallas, a Fabian socialist and respected educationalist who sat on the School Board as a Progressive in the 1890s, expressed this majority view when he wrote in *To-Day*, the 'socialist monthly,' that the true 'Socialist life' was one dedicated to 'teaching,' and to managing and administering education.[18] Like Wallas, many Fabians entered the public debates about the 'education question' from a position of recognised authority. Annie Besant and Stuart Headlam served alongside Wallas as Progressives on the London School Board, and, after 1888, Sidney Webb joined the London County Council in a similar capacity. The Fabians also wrote a new chapter in the history of British education with the foundation of the London School of Economics in 1896. With the LSE, Wallas, the Webbs, and Bernard Shaw instituted the principle of using 'modern' research methods to secure 'the betterment of society,' and envisioned an alternative to the Oxbridge tradition.[19] More generally, throughout the 1890s and 1900s, the Society published widely on questions of education and child welfare, including for instance commentaries on the Education Acts of 1902 and 1903, the case for 'State education,' 'What an Education Committee Can Do' (1911), Hubert Bland's 'After Bread, Education' (1905), and 'Child Labour Under Capitalism' (1908).[20]

The clearest exposition of the Society's official stance—one that disenfranchised Fabian Liberals like Wallas and H. W. Massingham—on the administrative side of the question is Sidney Webb's Fabian tract, 'The Education Muddle and the Way Out.'

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[17] Wells, 'Faults of the Fabian,' 392.
[18] Graham Wallas, 'Socialists and the School Board,' *To-day* no. 60 (1888), 126-32 (131).
[19] The London School of Economics, http://www.lse.ac.uk/aboutLSE/LSEHistory/lseHistory.aspx Accessed 20 March 2014. Copyright LSE 2014.
[20] J. Martin, *State Education at Home and Abroad*, vol. 52, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, 1894); Sidney Webb, *The Education Act, 1903: How to Make the Most of It*, vol. 117, Fabian tract (London: The Fabian Society, February 1904); George Robert Stirling Taylor, *The Education Acts of 1902, England and Wales, and 1903: with the revised text of the Education Acts, 1870-1899* (London: Routledge, 1903) Bland, *"After Bread, Education": a plan for the state feeding of school children*, 1-16; Education Committee, *What an Education Committee Can Do*, vol. 156, Fabian tract (London: Fabian Society, 1911).

Published in 1901, but drafted over more than a year of heated discussion at Fabian meetings and unofficial gatherings, this tract is essentially a manifesto outlining the case for 'administrative unity' under the auspices of the county and borough councils. The 'muddle' consisted, as the opening quotation from this section states, in the 'educational machinery,' or the unclear, relative legal authority of the School Boards and the county and borough councils. The 'way out,' Webb stated under the rubric 'Administrative Unity,' was incorporation:

> There ought to be, in each district of convenient size, one public education authority, and one only; responsible for providing and controlling all the education maintained in the district out of public funds, whether it be literary, scientific, commercial, artistic or technological in type—whether it be, for any of these types, primary, secondary or university in grade.[21]

The principle motivating Webb's assessment of what 'ought' to happen was the 'democratic ideal of education,' namely the social ideal that 'every child, dull or clever, rich or poor, should receive all the education requisite for the full development of its faculties.' This 'national minimum' of education, in Webb's words, served the interests of 'national well-being,' and ought legitimately to be met therefore by 'public funds.'[22] While Webb set aside for the time being 'the more difficult problems of what to teach and how to educate,' as we shall see below these were, contrary to scholarly opinion, questions to which the Fabians returned as vital *a priori* considerations for the development of what Edith Nesbit called 'true education.'[23] The 'muddle' was, but was not exclusively, administrative.

When Balfour's Conservative Government succeeded in passing the Education Bill in 1902, the Fabians publicly claimed responsibility for many of its recommendations. Edward Pease wrote, for instance, in his *History of the Fabian Society*,

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[21] Webb, *The Education Muddle and the Way Out*, 6.
[22] Webb, *The Education Muddle and the Way Out*, 18.
[23] Edith Nesbit, *Wings and the Child: Or, The Building of Magic Cities* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 15.

that 'it is unnecessary to describe the Fabian plan [outlined in 'The Education Muddle'], because it was substantially the system of administration established by the Act of 1902, under which present-day education is organised.'[24] With a like proprietary pride, Arthur Clutton-Brock, a Fabian and literary critic, wrote to the *Times Literary Supplement* that 'in the Education Act of 1902,' '13 amendments were formulated by the society, 11 of which were adopted by the House of Commons.'[25] Further, it was the Fabian George Robert Stirling Taylor who edited the Acts of 1902 and 1903 for publication with Routledge in 1903.[26]

With the extension of this legislation to the Education (London) Act of 1903, the Fabians' proprietary claims were equally pronounced. Bernard Shaw wrote for the *Daily Mail* with typical aplomb early in 1904 that the Act was the 'greatest educational advance ever made by the British House of Commons,' and was 'such a magnificent piece of educational socialism' that he believed it must, in the hands of the Government, have been 'a huge inadvertence, a blunder' into excellence. 'However that may be,' he continued:

> It is a triumph for the Government; it is a triumph for the County Council, which evolved in its Technical Education Board the model for the new authority that has superseded that poor old School Board (which ought to have been abolished ten years ago); and it is, as usual, a triumph for the Fabian Society, which formulated all the unsectarian demands with which the Act has complied.[27]

Evading the more immediate question of the seemingly unholy alliance between a Conservative Government and a socialist body, Shaw sang the Fabians as the heroes of a longer, sorry story. As E. G. Taylor lamented in 1896, after John Gorst's Education Bill failed to reach the Statute book, the history of British education from 1807 to 1870 was

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[24] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 144.
[25] Arthur Clutton-Brock, 'The Fabian Society,' *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 750 (1916), 260.
[26] Taylor, *The Education Acts of 1902, England and Wales, and 1903: with the revised text of the Education Acts, 1870-1899*, (London: Routledge, 1903).
[27] Bernard Shaw, 'Education and Electioneering,' *The Daily Mail* 27 February 1904, in Bernard Shaw, *Doctors' Delusions, Crude Criminology, and Sham Education* (London: Constable and Company, Limited, 1932), 268.

one in which 'the opponents of national education under public control were successful.'[28] It is this longer, diachronic narrative of the debates over public education, rather than the synchronic, partisan battles between 'forces' in the political field, through which the Fabians framed their answer to the 'education question.' As Shaw wrote elsewhere in defence of this outwardly confusing alliance, the 'secret' of the 'energetic support given to the Bill by ultra-Radicals like the Fabians' was the headway it made towards the 'frank acceptance by the State of the entire cost of education,' and the 'transfer of the effective control of education from the Established Church to the whole community.'[29] Public, secular education was the Society's aim, and, true to their policy of autonomy from the logic of partisan politics, the Fabians supported the party— 'regardless of its 'name' or the 'principles, Socialist or other,' it 'professe[d]'— that could pass its recommendations into legislation: in this case, Balfour's Conservative Government.[30]

Viewed from a vantage further to the left, however, an alternative perspective on the Fabians' support for Balfour's Act emerges. For many with Labour affiliations, the Fabians' collaboration with the Conservative Government was a gross act of 'Tory Fabianism,' and exposed the risks of their political agnosticism.[31] Ramsay MacDonald, who had renounced his membership from the Society over its failure to denounce the Transvaal War in 1900, argued before readers of the *Fortnightly Review* in 1908 that the Society's 'association' with 'every reactionary event and movement in politics,' from 'Tory Education Bills to South African Wars,' evidenced 'the futility of Socialism as a practical political guide when propounded by the bureaucratic experts who lead the

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[28] E. G. Taylor, 'The Education Crisis,' *Westminster Review* 145(1896), 644-59 (645).
[29] Bernard Shaw, 'Sectarian and Unsectarian Education,' *The Daily News* 25 August 1902, in Shaw, *Doctors' Delusions, Crude Criminology, and Sham Education*, 355.
[30] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 3.
[31] H. W. Massingham, 'Persons and Politics,' *The Speaker* (1903), 37-38 (37).

Fabian Society.'[32] MacDonald yoked here the culturally embedded hostility towards the figure of the 'bureaucrat,' discussed further below, to his denunciation of the Fabians' political mobility from the perspective of a Labour leader.

This sense of doctrinal transgression endured throughout later twentieth-century interpretations, particularly by Labour and Marxist historians. In his assessment of this episode of British education history, Denis Lawton remarked that 'the Webbs,' in their (perceived) capitulation to the Conservatives, 'were intellectual rationalists who had failed to learn the lessons of the Enlightenment, especially the need to temper reason and efficiency with humanity and fraternity.'[33] The familiar, 'dehumanising' Fabian found in earlier Marxist and 'literary modernist' polemic resonates here. Kenneth Morgan, too, interpreted the Fabians' support for the Education Acts as indicative of their monomaniacal commitment to 'efficiency':

> One is struck with equal force by their selflessness and their soul-lessness, by their dedication and their lack of humanity. Gradgrind was never far beneath the surface… Publicly, the Webbs were a kind of machine. They appeared to show little interest in a wider culture beyond the dictates of the 'housekeeping state.' They did not particularly admire the workers they were anxious to organise, educate and improve.[34]

Far from the 'pale abstractions of cultured humanity' encountered in Part 1, according to Labour historians Lawton, Morgan, Brian Simon and Kevin Manton, the Fabians were 'soul-less' Gradgrinds who in fact retarded genuine educational reform through their 'permeative' tactics of deflection and concession to Conservative demands. Recurrent accusations of the Fabians' lack of 'humanity,' and pragmatic and mechanistic indifference to human values—their indifference, that is, to the 'wider culture' beyond the political field—characterise these twentieth-century British Labour histories, and

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[32] John Ramsay MacDonald, 'Socialism and Politics,' *Fortnightly Review* 83, no. 498 (June 1908), 1061-68 (1061).
[33] Denis Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies: 1900-2001 and beyond* (London: Routledge, 2005 http://www.netLibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=115546) 13 2 April 2014. Electronic book
[34] Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour People: Leaders and Lieutenants, Hardie to Kinnock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 55-56.

have come to dominate how historians more generally engage with the founding Fabians, their place in British political history, and their correlative absence from British cultural history.[35]

Fabians and the 'Wider Culture' of Education: Evoking Matthew Arnold

This episode in British political history provides an occasion for re-evaluating the canonical view that the Fabians were 'soul-less,' 'bureaucratic experts' uninterested in human interests or human values. A cultural history prioritises just those human interests, contextualising the tensions that motivate political, and in this case particularly Labour and Marxist, interpretations through the close examination of the values and cultural strategies embedded in the 'text' or 'artefact' at hand. Combined with the increasing navigability of online periodical databases, this method uncovers, in the context of the Edwardian education debates, one such cultural strategy not acknowledged in canonical histories of the Fabian Society: namely, that the Fabians not only occupied a position on national education for which Matthew Arnold was a respected precursor, but that, aware of the conferred cultural authority to be won by this association, they evoked Arnold by name and by connotation to legitimise their advocacy for public education reform between the 1890s and 1910s. They positioned themselves, that is, within a long tradition of advocacy for public education, and not, as most commonly assumed, within the contemporary power struggles between parties that they actively and consistently eschewed.

Correlative to this observation, the following discussion also provides an opportunity for reconsidering the scholarly treatment of Matthew Arnold as the

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[35] Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960); Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement, 1870-1920* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965); Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-1940*, Studies in the history of education (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974); Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991); Kevin Manton, *Socialism and Education in Britain 1883-1902* (London: Woburn, 2001).

whipping boy of 'high culture,' particularly amongst British academics associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. The habitual flogging of Arnold by those vested in foregrounding the high/low interpretation of British culture has produced within the academy the scholarly doxa of Arnold-as-elitist-prig. In *Culture and Society*, a key text in this tradition, Williams argued that in his writing on 'culture,' Arnold habitually fell back onto 'stock notions of class' and a 'magnified image of the Rough' shaped by the 'material structure of society.'[36] While Williams recognised that of the advocates 'for a new national education' in the nineteenth century, none enjoyed 'the authority or effect of Arnold,' he nonetheless found Arnold to be weary, fearful even, of the 'immense numbers,' 'raw and rough,' of the 'working classes.'[37] If Arnold's State was a 'centre of light and authority' that transcended class interests, so too was it an organ of 'repression,' a quasi-authoritarian State that could impose order through centralised administration.

Williams was equally damning of the Fabians, to whom he gave sustained attention in his analysis of the 'Interregnum.' Putting aside for the moment Williams' problematic periodization of the years 1880 to 1914 as an unoriginal bridge between the twin peaks of the Victorian and Modern traditions—a time in which, apparently, 'we shall not find […] anything very new'—it is worth noting his treatment of the Fabians as 'writers of that period who have affected our thinking about culture.'[38] As flagged in the Introduction to this thesis, in two sections—'Shaw and Fabianism' and 'Critics of the State'—Williams identified two strands of 'Fabianism': the one associated with the 'orthodox person of Sidney Webb,' a 'direct inheritor of the [utilitarian] spirit of John Stuart Mill'; and the lesser-known variety of Bernard Shaw, which yoked Carlyle and

[36] Williams, *Culture and Society*, 116-7, 125.
[37] Williams, *Culture and Society*, 119, 123-4.
[38] Williams, *Culture and Society*, 161.

Ruskin with Bentham, Arnold and Mill.[39] Williams lodged the same criticism against 'orthodox,' utilitarian 'Fabianism' that William Morris had done in the 1890s, and that Carlyle and Arnold had against the utilitarians earlier in the century: namely, 'Fabianism,' in the 'normal,' Webbian model, 'overestimate[s] the importance of the *mechanism* of a system of society apart from the *end* towards which it may be used.'[40] The metaphor of the machine—in Morgan's description of the 'rationalist' Webbs, and here in Williams's characterisation—became a commonplace in histories of 'Fabianism.'

The logic of Williams' characterisation of the intellectual traditions—utilitarian *versus* Arnoldian—and his consequent categorisation of the Fabians within British intellectual history rests upon the supposition—insufficiently theorised and historicised—that 'Fabianism' was for all intents and purposes Webbian utilitarianism. We have seen already in Chapter 2 that the metonymy 'Fabianism' resisted simplification through a range of cultural associations. Recent academics further have repudiated this long-held interpretation of these philosophical underpinnings.[41] As we will see below, contrary to these Labour histories and cultural studies, the Fabians—including but not limited to Webb—were not strict utilitarians immune to the 'wider cultural' parameters of the education debates, but rather were deeply interested in the long history of public education reform, and also the cultural legitimacy that could be gained from evoking Arnold as a precursor to this position.

As Williams acknowledged, in the history of advocates for 'national education under public control,' Arnold was an outstanding spokesperson. In his capacity as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and Universities, Arnold toured widely through Europe's elementary, secondary and higher education institutions, publishing his

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[39] Williams, *Culture and Society*, 181-3.
[40] William Morris, 'Review,' *Commonweal* (25 January 1890), cited in Williams, *Culture and Society*, 181.
[41] Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, 210.

findings in both *The Popular Education in France* (1860), and in *Schools and Universities on the Continent*, drafted as a report for the Schools Inquiry Commission in 1865-67, and which was to be, as his editor R. H. Super remarked, Arnold's 'longest book.'[42]

However idealistically, throughout these reports and *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Arnold construed the State as classless. In the second chapter of this classic, entitled from the second edition 'Doing As One Likes,' Arnold countered the 'central idea of English life and politics,' namely, 'the assertion of personal liberty,' with an imported—Continental—notion of '*the State*,' which he defined as 'the nation in its collected and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for the general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals.'[43] The central thrust is that the one ought to be balanced by the other: 'by our best self,' Arnold wrote, 'we are united, impersonal, at harmony,' and this 'best self suggests the idea of *the State*.' The State, which transcends individual and class interests and serves the 'general advantage,' was an ideal Arnold projected for England. 'What if we tried,' he put to his reader:

> to rise above the idea of class to the idea of the whole community, the State, and to find our centre of light and authority there? Every one of us has the idea of country, as a sentiment; hardly any one of us has the idea of the State, as a working power. Any why? Because we habitually live in our ordinary selves, which do not carry us beyond the ideas and wishes of the class to which we happen to belong. And we are afraid of giving the State too much power, because we conceive of the State as something equivalent to the class in occupation of the executive government, and are afraid of that class abusing power to its own purposes.[44]

Responding to Arnold's identification of the State as a 'centre of light and authority' populated by better versions of our 'selves,' nineteenth-century commentators criticised

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[42] Arnold, *Democratic Education*, v; Matthew Arnold, *Schools and Universities on the Continent*, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), v.
[43] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 117.
[44] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 117.

Arnold for being a 'kid-glove apostle of Culture.'[45] This was a metaphor frequently used, as we will recall from its application to the Fabians in Part 1 of this thesis, in opposition to the 'horny handed sons of toil,' symbolising the distance between idealism and pragmatism, and between intellectual and physical exertion.[46] At the hands of critics from the left, this association has led to Arnold's reputation as an opponent of the 'working-class' movement.

As we can see in his writing, however, Arnold argued against Liberalism in favour of State intervention in the interests of 'wider society' beyond vested interests of class. His writing on public education in particular is frequently addressed to his 'Liberal friends' who opposed, on ideological grounds, State intervention *per se*. As Arnold instructed, 'it is not State-action in itself' which individuals or classes need fear, but 'State-action exercised by a hostile class.'[47] Arnold proposed an idea of the State as a classless 'authority' to prevent the 'hostile' predominance of one class with greater political capital ruling against the interests of another. This position resulted, in the 1890s, in the critical perception that while Arnold was no social democrat, he was nonetheless a cultural precursor to a position approximating Statist rule, in the model of the Prussian Government he praised in *Culture and Anarchy*.[48] Although Leslie Stephen, for instance, doubted whether Arnold would have in actual fact 'been attracted by State socialism,' he argued in an 1893 *National Review* article that Arnold's innate love of ideas made him the natural enemy of 'aristocracy,' and therefore a 'democrat' who supported 'stronger action of the central power' to save England from 'anarchy.'[49] Articles from the turn-of-the-century press with titles such as 'Matthew Arnold as

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[45] H. Herbert Dodwell, 'Matthew Arnold as a Social Reformer,' *Macmillan's Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1905), 53-65 (53).
[46] 'The London Press,' *The Contemporary Review* 7(1868), 262-76.
[47] Arnold, *Democratic Education*, 23.
[48] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 154-55.
[49] Leslie Stephen, 'Matthew Arnold,' *The National Review* 22, no. 130 (1893), 458-77 (471-2).

Political and Social Critic' (1898) and 'Matthew Arnold as a Social Reformer' (1905), which insisted that 'we must not seek in him any political system,' give reason to pause and reflect on just what Arnold's legacy was amongst reformers at the turn of the century, particularly amongst the Fabians of whom the same observation could be made.[50] On the basis of such an interpretation, a case could indeed be made for Arnold as a kind of proto-Fabian, an idea resumed in the conclusion of this thesis.

As the opening quotation from Burke suggests, Arnold considered education an appropriate area for the useful extension of State power in the 'wider interests' of society. On the desirability of State intervention in education, Arnold was clear. The State, as a 'centre of light and authority' that transcended class interests, could do more for the lower and middle classes than the 'aristocratic' or upper classes had hitherto shown themselves prepared to do. As Helen Small argues, Arnold outlined his 'view that the State should take responsibility for primary education, at least, and his sense of the damaging connection between education systems and class structures' in *The Popular Education of France* (1860), and *Culture and Anarchy* alike.[51] In his introduction to the earlier work, republished as 'Democracy,' Arnold had permitted himself to 'dwell,' he wrote, 'on a matter of practical institution, designed to meet new social exigencies: on the intervention of the State in public education.'[52] The autonomy of the State from class interests, and indeed the political alignments that institutionalised these interests, was vital: 'political considerations,' as Arnold had warned of the French education system, 'are in my opinion too much suffered to influence the whole working of the system of public education.'[53]

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[50] Dodwell, 'Matthew Arnold as a Social Reformer,'; B. N. Oakeshott, 'Matthew Arnold and a Political and Social Critic,' *Westminster Review* 149, no. 2 (1898), 161-76.
[51] Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 70-71.
[52] 'Introduction: Democracy,' Arnold, *Democratic Education*, 21.
[53] Arnold, *Schools and Universities on the Continent*, 196.

This was an objection to partisanship that the Fabians—collaborators with whatever party would see socialistic principles into legislation—conspicuously sympathised in their own effort to remain free from socialist ideology and partisan alliances in the articulation of the 'best' social policy. In this sense, Arnold provided a powerful precursor to Fabian arguments for excluding partisan interests from education policy, and for utilising the State as an equalising mechanism for society through the universal and compulsory provision of a 'minimum standard,' with Webb, of education. In their defence of 'administrative unity,' the Fabians were aware of the conferred cultural legitimacy to be gained by evoking Arnold as an ally.

They shared with Arnold, for instance, the metaphor of the 'organic connection' or the 'organic relation' between the 'various grades and types' of schools as a way of conceptualising the institutional structures of education delivery in England.[54] Webb capitalised explicitly on this Arnoldian association in a *Nineteenth Century* article defending the Education Act of 1902. Explaining the intellectual inheritance behind the Conservative legislation, over which the Fabians publicly claimed ownership, Webb wrote in 'London Education':

> But, with all this ['muddle'], London was still without an authority competent to deal with education as a whole. Fifty years ago, Matthew Arnold, crying in the wilderness, pointed out the absurdity of confining collective action to this or that particular grade of education, or to any one section of the community. [...] Public education has, therefore, insensibly come to be regarded, not as a matter of philanthropy undertaken for the sake of the individual children benefited, but as a matter of national concern undertaken in the interest of the community as a whole.[55]

Webb legitimised the Fabian proposal for 'administrative unity' by aligning his recommendations with those famously advocated by Matthew Arnold in the 1860s and 1870s. Ignoring the first clause of Webb's premise and honing in on the latter, however, Labour historians have long used such excerpts to accuse Webb of an 'elitist,' '"capacity-

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[54] W. F. Connell, *The Educational Thought and Influence of Matthew Arnold* (London: Routledge, 1998 [1950]) 88 ; Webb, *The Education Muddle and the Way Out*, 16.
[55] Sidney Webb, 'London Education,' *The Nineteenth Century* 54, no. 320 (1903), 561-80 (563).

catching"' mentality, and of using education to breed a generation of civil servants.[56] Webb's 'ideas continued to distort the development of Labour education' throughout the twentieth century, Denis Lawton wrote, remarking it is 'no coincidence' that the Tories adopted Webb's policies for secondary education, that the Webbs were impressed by the 'efficiency' of Stalin's Russia, or that William Morris left the Fabian Society before he died. This kind of conceptual leap, which proceeds from a free-floating and partial (editorialised) quotation to a generalisation of the Webbs as Stalin-loving bureaucrats, is highly problematic. When historicised, it becomes clear that Webb's reference in 'London Education' to 'a "capacity-catching" scholarship system' for students whose 'advanced instruction' would be 'profitable to the community' was just one item in a list of desirable 'tasks' for the new Education Authority for London, a list that was prefaced by the above reference to Matthew Arnold's advocacy for national education. Other 'tasks' included the complete 'physical, moral, and intellectual training' for London's 800,000 children; the provision of 'the widest possible opportunities for continuing their studies after leaving day school' and the 'best possible training for teachers of every kind and grade'; and the re-organisation of the 'whole machine as, while increasing knowledge and efficiency, to promote everywhere the development of character and culture, and ultimately to encourage the highest scholarship and the most advanced research.'[57] If 'efficiency and knowledge' were priorities for Webb's new education authority, so too were 'culture and character,' 'scholarship,' and 'advanced research.' Too frequently, Labour historians ignore these other aspects of the Fabians' interests.

More specifically, the Fabians looked to Arnold for a highly consecrated ally in rebutting doctrinal, and specifically Liberal, objections to State intervention *per se*. In his

[56] Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies: 1900-2001 and beyond*, 12.
[57] Webb, 'London Education,' 564.

own move of conferred legitimacy, Arnold had signalled his scepticism towards politicised opposition to State intervention by quoting Ernst Renan on the question of the State and French education. Arnold italicised a section to emphasise his own position:

> 'A Liberal believes in liberty, and liberty signifies the non-intervention of the State. But such an ideal is still a long way off from us, and the very means to remove it to an indefinite distance would be precisely the State's withdrawing its action too soon.' *And this, he adds, is even truer of education than of any other department in public affairs.*[58]

This peculiar 'twinning,' to borrow a term from Glenda Sluga, of statist liberalism will be followed up in Chapter 5. Webb, again, explicitly capitalised on this Arnoldian precedent in his own rebuttal of the Liberal resistance to the specific terms of the Education Bill of 1902, particularly the transferral of authority from the School Boards (which had a strong Non-Conformist element) to the elected County Councils. The central question for Webb, as for Arnold and Burke before him, was of the legitimate use or extension of the 'powers of Government.' The true offence was not perpetrated by the State upon the liberty of the individual, but rather by forces with partisan interests—the Liberals—upon the interests of society. In a 1901 article, again for the *Nineteenth Century*, Webb legitimised the Fabians' recommendations for education reform by evoking the precedent of Arnold during the Victorian debates:

[58] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 162.

> The Gladstonian section of the Liberal Party remains, in fact, axiomatically hostile to the State. It is not 'little Englandism' that is the matter with them; it is, as Huxley and Matthew Arnold correctly diagnosed, administrative Nihilism. Hence in politics they are inveterately negative, instinctively iconoclastic. They have hung up temperance reform and educational reform for a quarter of a century, because, instead of seeking to enable the citizen to refresh himself without being poisoned or inebriated, and to get the children thoroughly taught, they have wanted primarily to revenge their outraged temperance principles on the publican, and their outraged Nonconformist principles on the Church.[59]

As in the 'London Education' article from 1903, Webb construed the Edwardian education 'crisis' as the 'modern' recapitulation of a fifty-year-old ideological battle, with the British Liberals on one side, and the Fabians, flanked by Victorian intellectual heavyweights Matthew Arnold and Thomas Henry Huxley on the other. In coupling Huxley and Arnold—public rivals in the classical/modern debate, though privately close friends—Webb implicitly challenged the supposed dichotomy between 'Culture' *versus* science. He reconstrued the debate as 'Culture' and science *versus* 'administrative Nihilism,' or in other words, 'modern' education reform *versus* ideological recalcitrance. Helen Small offers a similar reading of Arnold's thesis in *Schools and Universities*. Arnold resisted Huxley's rhetoric, Small shows, of science *versus* 'culture' in favour of a more nuanced reading of '"the conflict between… the partisans of the old classical studies, and the partisans of what are called real, or modern, or useful studies."'[60] In our reconceptualisation of the Fabians' engagement with the 'wider culture' of the education debates, it is important to pay attention to the nuances of their rhetoric and the intellectual traditions with which they claimed allegiance. They consistently eschewed the logic and topical references of contemporary politics in favour of the longer, nineteenth-century 'struggle' for a national education system funded and organised by the State, allying themselves in the process with Matthew Arnold's legacy.

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[59] Sidney Webb, 'Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch,' *The Nineteenth Century* 50, no. 295 (1901), 366-86 (370).
[60] Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 75.

Arnold's value as an ally for the Fabians arose also from a more general precedent to do with the function and value of the impartial public figure—we might say 'intellectual'—in political debate. As Webb pointed out, too many of the great reformers of the nineteenth century had failed, either by conscious refusal or *naïve* omission, to adequately address the question of how their ideal visions of democratic or egalitarian reform could be realised in actuality. While they had formulated an answer to the symbolic side of the equation, 'what is the very best,' that is, they had failed to live up to their duty to the English public to address the practical challenge of 'how it may, in actual fact, be given.' Writing in a Fabian tract in 1918, Webb, again evoking this longer tradition, warned:

> A hundred years ago the best possible governmental machinery seems (as to Bentham and James Mill) to be exclusively lay in its nature; to be, indeed, nothing more than an array of directly elected councils of popular representatives, controlling the policy put into education by an exiguous and practically unspecialised bureaucracy. The ardent Socialists of a generation ago, with all their magnificent ideas as to the functions of a Collectivist State, had scarcely a more adequate vision than Bentham and James Mill of the government they desired; and often, indeed (as with William Morris, and I suspect also, in his hours of ease Karl Marx) saved themselves the trouble of precise thought about so dull a subject as administrative machinery by toppling over into a Utopian Communism.[61]

Matthew Arnold, the lone voice 'in the wilderness,' was a notable exception, a high Victorian, cultural 'prophet' who had in fact given due thought to the unromantic problem of the structures of delivery. A sane, formal system of education was necessary, because children would not, as Morris would have it, absorb literacy by osmosis. Straining against a deep-seeded, liberal resistence to excessive State powers, Webb recognised a consonance in his own vision of a 'specialised,' but unpartisan, 'bureaucracy,' and Arnold's position on the same problems as he had experienced and attempted to counter them in the mid-nineteenth century.

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[61] Webb, *The Teacher in Politics*, 7.

It is worth noting, in this reconsideration of the dominant readings of 'Fabianism,' that Webb consciously distanced 'Fabianism' from the utilitarian tradition of Bentham and James Mill, father of John Stuart Mill, in favour of a kind of statist liberalism filtered through Arnold. Webb's rhetoric bolsters Mark Bevir's recent argument that the long-presumed 'utilitarianism' of the Fabians—an attribute compounded by the 'literary modernist' and Marxist historiographical traditions alike—needs to be revised. Contrary to the 'old historiography,' Bevir argues, the Fabians 'owed less to utilitarianism and classical political economy than to ethical positivism and neoclassical and marginal economic theories.'[62] Correlative to this, it undermines analyses predicated on this long-held view, such as Williams' equation of 'Fabianism' with 'utilitarianism,' and his consequent pitting of both against the cultural legacy of Arnold. If we can follow Helen Small in revisiting Arnold's relationship with 'utilitarianism'—his idea of 'Culture' is not 'simply hostile to utilitarianism'—so too can we reconsider the long-cherished opposition between 'Fabianism' and 'Culture.'[63]

When viewed from the predominant ways of construing British politics and culture of this period, Matthew Arnold and the Fabians make on the face of it implausible allies. The former was the 'apostle' (culprit) of 'Culture' with a capital 'c,' the latter, its technocratic counter-embodiment. It is a binary that underpins Williams' influential analysis, for instance, in *Culture and Society* (1958), an interpretation of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British history in which both Arnold and the Fabians function as strong coordinates mapping out the cultural terrain that Williams traversed. Williams pitted these coordinates against one another in his reading of the dual forces in the educational priorities of Victorian and Edwardian thinkers: 'the work of perfection, which Arnold was to name Culture, received increasing emphasis in

[62] Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, 131-32.
[63] Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 86.

opposition to the powerful Utilitarian tendency which conceived education as the training of men to carry out particular tasks in a particular kind of civilisation.'[64]

But Arnold was not only fully aware, as seen above, but repeatedly insisted that 'the work of perfection' needed 'administration' to save it from the 'anarchistic' tendencies of the Englishman's instinctive suspicion of 'State-action'; the Fabians, equally, were sensitive both to the 'cultural value of education,' with G. D. H. Cole, or 'culture and character,' with Webb, and the human values at the heart of the system.[65] For both, the question was not as Williams would have it of mutually exclusive or competing absolutes ('Culture,' or 'utilitarianism'), but rather of a relational system patient of both. As the educationalist W. Lightbody stated in a 1904 *Westminster* article on 'Culture and Efficiency in Education,' the presumed dichotomy between 'classical' and 'modern' values in education was in fact a false one: 'there is room for both in these years of our life devoted to education, and the cultivation of one is no excuse for the neglect of the other.'[66] As seen above, again both Arnold and the Fabians found room for 'culture' and 'efficiency' in their visions for modern education. Having accepted State action to secure the education of the nation's young as, in principle, a valuable function of democracy, the challenge was administrative: as Arnold phrased it, the question was 'how to organise this authority, or to what hands to entrust the wielding of it? How to get your *State*, summing up the right reason of the community, and giving effect to it, as circumstances require, with vigour?'[67]

In their attention to 'how to organise' the State, or how 'the very best may, in actual fact, be given,' both Arnold and the Fabians were effectively thinking and

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[64] Williams, *Culture and Society*, 111.
[65] 'The Aims of Education,' [1942] in G. D. H. Cole, *Essays in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 54.
[66] W. M. Lightbody, 'Culture and Efficiency in Education,' *Westminster review, Jan. 1852-Jan. 1914* 162, no. 3 (1904), 285-88 (287).
[67] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 123.

operating as 'bureaucrats.' While this derogatory epithet is commonplace in histories of the Fabians—seen in Ramsay MacDonald's review above, and, for instance, in Bruce Robbin's description of Raymond Williams' *The Volunteers* (1978) as depicting 'a group of Fabian-style professionals whose political program is infiltration of the bureaucratic system, using the weapon of careerism'—it may less readily be applied to Arnold without explanation.[68] The 'bureaucrat' was practically a stock villain in the nineteenth-century British imagination, a figure who, as Charles Kingsley wrote in *Alton Locke* (1850), like the 'plutocrat' was one of the 'tyrants of the earth' responsible for the mechanisation of the outward world in which human subjects lived and breathed.[69] As Small again recently remarked of Arnold, however, he was, in his capacity as an Inspector of Schools, not so much a sage as a 'bureaucrat,' albeit one who 'concede[d] almost nothing to the formulaic language of bureaucracy that standardly places a high value on practical usefulness and economic utility.'[70] Arnold nonetheless did reserve a place for the language of utilitarianism in his appraisal of the functions of primary education, where the acquisition of numeracy and literacy were a legitimate, and assessable, way of evaluating the effectiveness of the system.

Aware of this reputation and its negative connotations, the Fabians tried to rescue the figure of the 'bureaucrat' from its deeply embedded (anti)cultural connotations by yoking to it the Arnoldian critical criterion of 'disinterestedness.' A highly literate body, the Society recognised in 'disinterestedness' a powerful, cultural metaphor for the quintessential Fabian principle of autonomy, or the Society's ideal of freedom from partisan interests in the articulation of the 'best' mechanisms for social reform. Arnold outlined the 'business' of 'disinterested criticism' in a *National Review*

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[68] Robbins, *Intellectuals*, 283.
[69] Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet* 1st ed., 2 vols. (London1850), Vol.2, xx, 295.
[70] Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 12.

article, 'The Functions of Criticism at the Present Time' in 1864: namely, as he had argued elsewhere, it implied the desire 'to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and, by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas.' Disinterested critics, therefore, allowed the 'free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches,' and 'steadfastly refus[ed]' to admit of 'any of the ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas' to compromise right thinking.[71]

Throughout the Society's literature, this critical criterion of 'disinterestedness' functioned as a metaphor for Fabian descriptions of their own strategies, duties, and values: the classless State, political agnosticism, freedom from party 'considerations.' Bernard Shaw, for instance, implored the Fabian Society not to pander to 'party divisions,' but rather to appeal to 'disinterested and politically conscientious Englishmen' in shaping public opinion on the Boer War in 1900.[72] Many years earlier, Beatrice Webb had confided in her diary that she desired 'to carve out a career of disinterested research.'[73] Edward Pease described Webb's Minority Report as 'a document obviously the work of highly skilled and disinterested political thinkers and experts.'[74] Although ultimately as unsuccessful as the 'Education Muddle' was successful, the Minority Report was a non-partisan report published by the Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws (1905-1909), an appointed body comprising members of the municipal government boards, the Charity Organisation Society, and both Charles Booth and Beatrice Webb. Shaw again used the term to justify the work of the Society in securing the future of social democracy. 'Without qualified rulers,' Shaw wrote in a

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[71] Matthew Arnold, 'ART. VIII.- The Functions of Criticism at the Present Time,' *The National Review*, no. 1 (November 1864), 230-51 (239-40).
[72] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book. C8, 24 November 1899, 12.
[73] Webb and MacKenzie, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*. Vol. 1, 234.
[74] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 219.

memorandum, 'a Socialist State is impossible.'[75] The only candidates for this role are those who 'have proved themselves qualified for more serious and disinterested work than "stoking up" election meetings to momentary and foolish excitement.' In such instances, the Fabians carved out an ideal of public leadership legitimised by 'disinterested' or autonomous criticism of the conditions of English politics, culture, and society in terms highly consonant with Arnold's own ideas of the ideal public vocation.

For a sense of what these Fabians meant by the term, we can look to Arthur Clutton-Brock's review of Pease's *History*, published in the *Times Literary Review* in 1916. Clutton-Brock was a journalist and literary critic who joined the Fabian Society, like so many 'people known in politics, literature, or the arts,' in the first decade of the 1900s.[76] In his *TLS* review, Clutton-Brock used the recent publication of Pease's *History* as an opportunity to present an insider's view of who the Fabians were, and what made the Society remarkable amongst the British socialist organisations and parties of the day. The primary difficulty that the English public encountered when understanding how to place the Society, Clutton-Brock acknowledged, was that 'the Fabians in fact are now, and have been for some time, an anomalous body.' This is by now a familiar observation about the challenges presented by the Society's 'anomalous' status, shaping not only the public's response but also, as we have seen throughout this thesis, the scholarly and political response to 'Fabianism.' Unable, therefore, to authorise the Society by association with any recognisable party or doctrine, Clutton-Brock offered the reader an alternative referent through which to interpret its 'anomalous' status, namely the cultural criterion of 'disinterestedness.'

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[75] Bernard Shaw, 'On Guild Socialism,' in Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 268.
[76] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 187.

> It would be a great disaster for English Socialism, and for all political thought, if the old Fabian tradition died out of the society, if it lost its peculiar disinterestedness and became merely a vague popular body, or a political organisation, or a collection of advanced and sentimental cranks.[77]

Clutton-Brock went on to use the term and its cognates no fewer than sixteen times in this short review. In particular, he used it to qualify the Fabians' professional status: 'the early Fabians in fact, those who made the society and have worked for its ever since with a pure if dry disinterestedness, were not amateurs, but professionals, experts, specialists.' And again, 'they never let their professionalism overcome their disinterestedness.' Their lack of partisanship was not a sign of ignorance, but of their 'indifferen[ce] to political prizes.'

The figure of the 'disinterested' Fabian 'expert' or public figure appeared again four years later, in Beatrice and Sidney Webb's *Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain* (1920). Here, the Webbs proposed a modern civil administrator in terms that corroborate Shaw's insistance, in 'To Your Tents, Oh Israel!,' that the Society's function ceased when the work of 'permeation' was achieved:

> The proposed new feature is that, in every case, the disinterested professional expert who invents, discovers, audits, costs, tests, or measures—in supplement to the initiative in all these respects of the administration itself—will have no power of command, and no right to insist on his suggestion being adopted. His function is exhausted when his report is made.[78]

The Webbs, like Clutton-Brock before them, evoked 'disinterestedness,' which would have been associated among the educated reading public with Matthew Arnold's writing on culture and society, to legitimise the Fabians' attempt to navigate authority—the right to participate in public, political life—and autonomy—the ability to do so free from the logic of factional interests. Unlike politicians or cranks, the 'disinterested' Fabian

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[77] Clutton-Brock, 'The Fabian Society,' 260.
[78] Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, ed. S. Beer (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920), 198.

'expert' could, like Arnold's 'disinterested critic,' be trusted to adjudicate matters of general interest without being compromised by 'ulterior' partisan 'considerations.'

If Clutton-Brock's strategy of rescuing the much-derided 'expert' with the criterion of 'disinterestedness' was novel, the use to which he put another Arnoldian category, the 'Philistine,' was more so. 'The Fabians' dryness,' he claimed, 'their Philistinism, was a part of their disinterestedness.' Clutton-Brock reappropriated this Arnoldian class marker, retaining the sense of a new middle class, while shedding it of its shortcomings. The distinction he is asserting—at first glance a strange one for a literary critic professionally as well as intellectually invested in both socialism and the arts—is that the Fabian 'experts,' unlike their more Romantic, Utopian, or Marxist comrades from the socialist movement, were drawn to socialism not as a 'religion, a state of mind,' or a self-congratulatory expression of 'their own generous emotions,' but as 'a scientific method' of social reform. They were in this sense immune, like the Philistine, to the non-rational values of aesthetics and spirituality as a basis for cognition. 'It is easier,' Clutton-Brock explained, 'to admire Ruskin, or more modern substitutes for Ruskin, to wear sandals or to live on nuts, than to study facts and make definite proposals based on the study of them.' Thus echoing Sidney Webb's earlier complaint about the failure of the nineteenth-century utilitarians and reformers like Morris to 'trouble' themselves with 'dull' 'administrative machinery,' Clutton-Brock recast these Arnoldian criteria in Fabian terms: 'Philistinism' as a kind of immunity against the emotional, non-rational appeal of ideology or 'class struggle' rhetoric, and 'disinterestedness' as a metaphor for their indifference to political capital and 'ulterior, political considertions.' To conclude, Clutton-Brock claimed that nowhere was the efficacy of this distinctive Fabian *modus operandi* more evident than in Balfour's 'Education Act of 1902,' which was shaped by Webb's Fabian tract. The Society's

'leaders,' whom he described as 'disinterested, united, and of commanding ability' had through their 'peculiar character,' changed the course of British social history.

'Porro Unum Est Necessarium'

The Fabians were, contrary to the predominant scholarly view, interested in the 'wider culture' beyond the strictly political, legislative dimensions of the 'education problem.' As flagged in the introduction of this chapter, the 'squabble' over the legislative reforms occurred within a larger debate over what education was for, and what impact the current 'machine-made education' was having on the imaginative development of the child. In one instance of what this broader conversation looked like, Wilfred Leadman, an educationalist who contributed regularly to the periodical press at the turn of the century, wrote for *Academy* in 1907 that while 'reformers' and 'educational authorities who sit in high places loudly lament that the average composition of the average public schoolboy is unvarying in its utter cheapness, want of originality, and lack of imagination,' it was just these 'educational "experts"' who had designed the system that led inevitably to 'the gradual deterioration of the imaginative faculty in boyhood.'[79] If calls for 'administrative unity' were growing apace in the 1890s, in the early 1900s so too were demands for the respect for the 'imaginative' life and early development of the child. It was, with Swedish educationalist Ellen Key, the dawn of 'the century of the child,' and the Fabians, particularly Edith Nesbit, Bernard Shaw, and H. G. Wells, were once more at the forefront of the debate.[80]

While there are few scholarly studies on the Fabians' ideas about early childhood learning and development (Kay Daniels's study on Emma Brooke is one exception), A. S. Byatt dramatised this aspect of the early Fabians' extra-political interests in *The*

[79] Wilfrid M. Leadman, 'A Neglected Faculty in Youth,' *The Academy*, no. 1845 (1907), 894-96.
[80] Ellen Key, *The Century of the Child*, trans. Havelock Ellis (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900 [Trans. 1909]).

Children's Book (2009).[81] An ambitious *roman fleuve* exploring England's radical subculture at the turn of the twentieth century, *The Children's Book* explores ideas about the intellectual and libidinal experiences of children raised in the radical, and explicitly Fabian, household of Toadfright Hall. While her protagonist Olive Wellwood was loosely based on the Fabian Edith Nesbit, the emotional interest of the narrative resides in Byatt's younger characters, children who feel desire, ambition, shame, and depression on the stage of an adult world pushing the boundaries of traditional familial, political, and social structures. In a narratorial segue into the documentary tone, Byatt observed:

> The Fabians and the social scientists, writers, and teachers saw, in a way earlier generations had not, that children were people, with identities and desires and intelligences. They saw that they were neither dolls, nor toys, nor miniature adults. They saw, many of them, that children needed freedom, needed not only to learn, and be good, but to play and be wild.[82]

Byatt's claim that the Fabians were at the vanguard of a generational shift in cultural attitudes towards children opens up the further possibility of the symbolic facet of their role in the modern education debates. If they legitimised their stance on public education through positioning themselves within a longer history of advocacy in which Matthew Arnold was the brightest light, so too did they engage in the contemporary debates about the ideals and ideas at stake beyond the 'machinery' of the system.

Recognising the cultural shift in attitude towards children that Byatt described above, educational commentators at the turn of the century coined the formula—with the now-familiar stamp of 'extreme modernity'—the 'New Teaching' to describe its applications in the field of education. An article from the Education Supplement of the *Academy* in 1902, for instance, explained that the essential difference between the 'new teaching' and the traditional pedagogy was that in the former, 'the pupil's likes and

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[81] Kay Daniels, 'Emma Brooke: Fabian, Feminist and Writer,' *Women's History Review* 12, no. 2 (2006), 153-68.
[82] A. S. Byatt, *The Children's Book* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 394.

dislikes must be considered.'[83] A more colourful illustration of the 'new teaching' by one of its leading spokespeople (according to this *Academy* article) appeared in a piece called 'What's Wrong with Our Education System,' published in *The Sunday Pictorial* in June 1918:

> When young people are as free to walk out of a classroom where they are bored by a dull teacher as grown-up people are to walk out of a theatre where they are bored of a playwright, the schools will be far more crowded than the theatres, and the teachers far more popular than the actors.[84]

The author of this article was Bernard Shaw, who was identified in the 1902 *Academy* article, alongside H. G. Wells, as one of the leading thinkers of the 'new' school. In education, as in so many of the other 'modernisms' encountered in this thesis—the 'new drama,' the 'new journalism,' the 'new politics,' the 'new woman,' and so forth—the Fabians were popularly associated with the progressive ways of thinking about traditional problems. Raymond Williams' qualification of the so-called 'Interregnum' as an historical gulf in which nothing 'very new' happened, and the Fabians as unromantic purveyors of 'utilitarian' policy, is, when a cultural-historical lens is applied, time and again undermined by the period's own self-conscious modernity and the place afforded to the Fabians within it.

For the most energetic advocate of the 'New Teaching' among the Fabians, we need to turn our sights from Wells and Shaw to the figure of Edith Nesbit. A member of the Society from its founding years until her death in 1924, Nesbit served on the publishing committee that published the very first Fabian tract, 'Why Are the Many Poor,' in 1884, and drafted one of the Society's few fiction tracts, 'Ballads and Lyrics of Socialism,' published in 1908.[85] Nesbit embodied, that is, the 'disinterested' public figure

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[83] 'Education Supplement: The New Teaching,' *The Academy*, no. 1550 (1902), 57.
[84] 'What is Wrong With Our Education System,' The Sunday Pictorial (16 June 1918), in Shaw, *Doctors' Delusions, Crude Criminology, and Sham Education*, 325.
[85] Edith Nesbit, *Ballads and Lyrics of Socialism* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1908).

of the Fabians' Arnoldian vision. Having secured her popular reputation with the success of her children's adventure stories and fairy tales, including not only the *Bastables* and *Psammead* series but also numerous lesser-known series for illustrated titles like *Strand Magazine*, Nesbit enjoyed throughout the early 1900s a public reputation as an authority on child welfare and education reform. Her real-life 'magic city,' constructed for the Children's Welfare Exhibition in 1912 to 1913, for instance, attracted wide media interest, and proved especially popular among readers of *The Magic City* (1910), a fantasy story in which Philip and his stepsister Lucy build a whole new world from physical household items, including books, candlesticks, and that late-Victorian favourite, 'bricks.' The object of this Exhibition, which ran from 31 November 1912 to 11 January 1913, was 'to show the latest developments,' so the *Times* reported, 'in the Education and Health, Comfort and Recreation of Children.'[86] Nesbit's status as a recognised authority in these 'latest developments' overlapped, we shall see, with what Marcus Crouch refered to (or dismissed, rather) as her 'Fabian conscience.'[87]

In 1913, Nesbit published *Wings and the Child*, a manifesto of the 'new teaching' that wove the building of 'magic cities,' as its subtitle suggests, into a theory of early childhood development that she 'dedicated to the teachers of public elementary schools of Great Britain.'[88] Nesbit both critiqued the materialistic tendencies of the contemporary education system in terms common to the broader debate, and proposed her own 'new ways' to reform 'the old systems of education.' She signalled the direction of her thoughts with the observation, suggestive of the recent Welfare Exhibition, that 'public interest has centred more and more on the welfare of the child. Books are written, societies formed, newspapers founded in the interest of the child, and true

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[86] 'Daily News & Leader: 'The Welfare Exhibition',' *The Times*, no. 3 (19 November 1912), 3.
[87] Marcus Crouch, *The Nesbit Tradition* (London: Benn, 1972), 17.
[88] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child*, v.

education becomes a possibility.'[89] Nesbit tapped into the current of 'public interest' in child welfare, an 'interest' which was made manifest throughout the 1880s with, for instance, the establishment of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children; the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act (the 'Children's Charter') of 1889, and the Children's Act of 1908, which enabled the State to intervene in domestic matters in the interests of the child; and the increasingly sophisticated genre of children's writing, which since the 1880s with Andrew Lang's *Blue Books* and Nesbit's transformative literature was undergoing a pivotal chapter in its own history.[90]

To raise the profile of *Wings and the Child*, and perhaps capitalise on the momentum generated by the Children's Welfare Exhibition, Nesbit pre-published a chapter in the *Saturday Review* under the title, 'Porro Unum Est Necessarium.'[91] With its clear Arnoldian overtone—evoking by its title and subject matter his own eponymous article for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1878, and the fifth chapter, from the second edition, of *Culture and Anarchy*—this article introduced Nebsit's own diagnosis of the problem with, and proposal of the 'one needful thing' for, modern elementary education.[92] 'One of the things that is the matter with modern education,' she wrote in a clear affirmation of the 'new teaching,' 'is the absence of the conception of personal idiosyncrasies, tastes, character and temperament' of the child.'[93] The 'one thing necessary' to remedy this 'indifference to personality,' which in fact 'makes the whole of our civilisation vulgar and vain,' was the articulation of an education system sympathetic to just these needs of the individual child.

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[89] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child*, 15.
[90] Crouch, *The Nesbit Tradition*, 16.
[91] Edith Nesbit, 'Porro Unum Est Necessarium,' *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 115, no. 2996 (1913), 391-92 (392).
[92] Matthew Arnold, 'Porro Unum Est Necessarium,' *Fortnightly Review* 24, no. 143 (1878), 589-604.
[93] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child*, 191.

Evoking an argument familiar from Romantic radicals through Shelley and Coleridge, to the Victorian sages Carlyle and, of course, Arnold, Nesbit warned that modern 'civilisation' was tending ever increasingly towards materialism and mechanisation.[94] The 'great, stupid, crashing, blundering machine which we call civilisation' has forgotten 'mercy, loving-kindness, justice, truth, and beauty': that is to say, with Arnold, 'civilisation' has forgotten 'culture.'[95] She implored those with a sense of 'culture' to rally to the cause of imaginative childhood:

> I would have every man and woman in whom the heart of childhood lives, protest, however, feebly and haltingly, yet with all the power of the heart, against machine-made education—against the instruction which crams a child with facts and starves it of dreams, which forces the free foot into heavy boots and bids it walk on narrow pavement, which crushes with heavy hand the wings of the soul, and presses the flower of imagination flat between the pages of a lexicon.[96]

Far from the 'Gradgrind' Fabian of Morgan's review, or the 'mechanistic' utilitarian of Williams', Nesbit distilled views found in the writings of Webb, Shaw, Wells and others, on the duty of the educated, liberal elite to 'protest' and speak out on questions of public importance. There were two facets to her solution to this problem: one was highly practical, having to do with what and how children are taught; the other was political, outlining the State's obligations in the education of the young.

In part, *Wings and the Child* presented a detailed and practical programme for childhood education. Ranging over educational activities from nursery rhymes to parlour games, word play and games of association, to the building of 'magic cities' and the taking of seaside holidays, Nesbit's recommendations were designed to nurture the instinctive imaginative and creative impulses of the child. In a chapter three, 'Playthings,' for instance, she complained that the contemporary trend of 'character dolls'—dolls with prescribed accessories and identities, like a 'nurse' doll, the toy

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[94] Arnold, for example, wrote that compared to the civilisations of antiquity, the 'modern world' is increasingly 'mechanical and external.' See Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 117.
[95] Nesbit, 'Porro Unum Est Necessarium,' 392.
[96] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child*, 8.

soldier, or 'Baby Willy'—limit the child's opportunity to project an imagined life into the toy itself. Comparable observations, particularly on the joys of 'bricks,' are found in Wells's *Floor Games* (1911), and even *The New Machiavelli* (1911). The toys that children love best,' Nesbit claimed, 'are always those toys which lend themselves to such symbolic use': the wooden peg transformed into a bailiff, the plain doll transformed into Joan of Arc, a candlestick that stood as the Gates of Babylon.[97] The 'new teaching,' recognising that the primary instinct in the child is to 'create,' aimed to foster, rather than stifle, Leadman and Nesbit both argued, this imaginative drive.

Correlative to these practical suggestions was Nesbit's polemic about the role that the State ought to assume in providing an education of the calibre she envisaged for the children of England. Hints as to how Nesbit's views on the question of public education and child welfare were shaped by her socialist convictions are strewn through her children's writing from the late 1890s and early 1900s: not only the hard times beset upon the Bastable children, but also the Utopian-inspired tenth chapter of *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), aptly named 'The Sorry-Present and the Expelled Little Boy,' in which the futuristic child Wells, named 'after the great reformer' who 'lived in the Dark Ages,' delights the Edwardian time-travellers with stories of his daily lessons and 'special subject' in railways.[98] In her conclusion to *Wings and the Child*, Nesbit outlined her stance on the 'way out' in clear terms:

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[97] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child*, 17-23.
[98] E. Nesbit, 'The Amulet: The Sorry-Present and the Expelled Little Boy,' *Strand Magazine* 31, no. 182 (February 1906), 224-32 (229).

> What we want is that there should be a distribution of wealth so changed from the one that now destroys the nation's balance as to put every parent in a position to pay for his child's education, and that the nation's schools should be so superlatively better than all other schools that no parent would dream of sending his child to any school but that provided by the nation for the nation's children.[99]

It would be a mistake to think Nesbit was any the less radical on account of her passion for children's welfare. H. G. Wells believed Nesbit was not simply socialistic in the idiosyncratic, Fabian way, but instinctively 'radical and anarchistic.' 'Her soul,' he reflected in 1934, 'was against the government all the time.'[100] If this radicalism 'bubbled' beneath the surface of her children's fiction—'the Bastables are an anarchistic lot,' Wells claimed— it broke the surface of her polemical writing on the need to reform modern education. In 'Porro Unum Est Necessarium,' for instance, Nesbit penetrated what she perceived to be the rhetoric of reform to the base political motivations of legislators. 'There is talk now of a great measure for the reform of national education; much talk, and there will be more.'[101] The public should not be fooled, however: 'A tottering Government may keep itself in power by such a measure—a defeated party may by it bring itself back to office,' but such 'talk' does not in actuality provide for the 'one thing needful,' the provision of a public education sympathetic to the imaginative needs of the child.

As the inclusion of Wells and Shaw in the *Academy* article on the 'New Teaching' suggests, Nesbit was not alone among the Fabians in advocating new, more sympathetic and creative strategies in elementary education. Even the supposed arch-utilitarian Sidney Webb, contrary to canonical opinion, showed himself to be interested in this extra-legislative aspect of the modern education debates. Webb signalled this interest in the questions raised by the 'new teaching' at the conclusion of his otherwise highly technical tract, 'The Education Muddle,' ending with the promise of further discussion:

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[99] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child*, 196.
[100] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, Vol.2, 604.
[101] Nesbit, 'Porro Unum Est Necessarium,' 392.

'the still more important and more difficult problems of what to teach and how to educate, remain for separate consideration.'[102] One such separate occasion came with Webb's subsequent tract, 'The Teacher in Politics' (1918). Here, Webb reiterated aspects of Nesbit's articulation of the 'one needful thing':

> What can be done to redeem the Elementary School from its present almost invariable ugliness; to make it a place of really educational sense-impressions in form and colour, cleanliness and beauty; to make it positively attractive to the pupils? Are we satisfied with the condition of the school-room atmosphere—not to say also the condition of the pupils' minds—at the end of the day's work, and if not, what ought to be insisted upon in order to make children's sojourn in the school-room—they spend there quite a large portion of their waking lives—actually healthful to them; and not, as is at present too often the case, an adverse influence on their physical well-being, to be counteracted by open-air games and exercises?[103]

For the student trained in the twentieth-century school of thought, this excerpt reads on the face of it more like an Arts and Crafts manifesto than a tract drafted by Sidney Webb: in its evaluation of 'beauty' and 'ugliness,' and 'form and colour,' and the impact that the 'sense impressions' evoked by the architecture of the physical space exerts upon the individual human mind—the child's mind—this excerpt is so far removed from the standard perception of 'Fabianism' that it seems almost impossible to reconcile with the Society's 'utilitarian' reputation. Webb recognised, however, like Nesbit before him, that 'true education' was possible only after the imaginative and physical interests of the individual child were met. For Webb, that is, as for his 'disinterested' Fabian peers involved in the 'New Teaching,' the 'way out' of the 'education muddle' required due consideration of both sides of the equation, 'But what is the very best, and how, in actual fact, may it be given?'

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[102] Webb, *The Education Muddle and the Way Out*, 19.
[103] Webb, *The Teacher in Politics*, 11-12.

4 The State and the Arts: Fighting for a 'Free Stage'

> The new drama was in the main an occasional affair, highly experimental, and appealing only to a small and seriously minded group of 'intellectuals' in London. They very largely belonged to the literary fringe of the Fabian Society and other reform and revolutionary organisations, and these were practically the sole supporters of the Independent Theatre, the Stage Society and the New Century Theatre.[1]
>
> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties* (1913)

In his 'review of art and ideas' in the 1890s, published shortly before the First World War, writer and publisher Holbrook Jackson attributed the emergence of the 'new drama' to the 'intellectuals' of the Fabian Society and the contemporary socialist movement. Hindered in their 'experimental' art, Jackson argued, by the lack of an audience and a theatre receptive to their 'radical' ideas—exemplified by the false start of Charles Charrington's precocious production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in 1889—this dramatic *avant-garde* had in fact to wait till the close of the 1890s for Harley Granville Barker to bring the Incorporated Stage Society, and through it the modern movement in British drama, to life.[2] Jackson, who himself joined the Fabian Society in 1907 in the wake of 'the episode of Mr. Wells,' mentioned by name fellow Fabians 'G.B.S,' Harley Granville Barker, and Charles 'Martin' Charrington as champions of the 'new drama.' He might also have included playwrights and editors Edward Garnett and St. John Ervine, chairman of the Stage Society and publisher Frederick Whelen, and *New Age* drama critics Ashley Dukes, Leslie Haden Guest, and Herbert Trench.

The prevalence of Fabian 'intellectuals' in the development of the 'new drama' is an acknowledged, if inadequately historicised, feature of turn-of-the-century British history. Since the 'cultural turn' of the 1980s and 1990s, historians interested in the

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[1] Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 209.
[2] Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 209.

relation between British socialism and the arts have increasingly investigated these overlapping affiliations.[3] The dominant view is that the crossovers may be explained in terms of the Society's municipal programme: the Fabians envisioned a role for the State as the sponsor of the theatre as a cultural service for the 'working classes.' The political historian Chris Waters theorised this position in *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture* (1990). The Fabians, Waters argued, like the municipal socialists associated with the Progressives on the London County Council, were part of a sub-section of the socialist movement that, disillusioned with the 'working classes,' 'turned to the state' to implement the cultural changes they sought. This statist 'strategy,' imposed by the 'Fabians and their sympathisers' upon the 'new lifers' and disciples of William Morris who took aesthetics and 'working-class' culture seriously, was buoyed 'by the belief that the state, both at the national and local levels,' could both 'disseminate new values in working-class communities,' and 'encourage working-class access to the cultural inheritance of the nation.'[4] The State in this view was a mechanism for securing public access to the arts.

Ruth Livesey's *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism* (2007) illustrated how this political interpretation has been used to corroborate literary scholarship on turn-of-the-century socialist movements and literary culture, particularly the periodization of 'Edwardian' writers and 'literary modernism.' Livesey quoted Waters's thesis to bolster her positioning of the Fabians—interested only in the 'expert municipal provision of basic cultural goods,' including libraries, galleries, and the theatre—between the socialist aestheticism of William Morris, and Virginia Woolf's 'literary

[3] Burke, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Cultural History,' 2.
[4] Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

modernism.' Reportedly reducing 'aesthetics to a functional social good,' 'Shaw's Fabian generation' provided a utilitarian counter-point in Livesey's literary history.[5]

While the interpretation of the Fabians as champions of the municipal and state theatre seems at first glance consistent with the Society's advocacy for state education evaluated in Chapter 3, the Fabians were far from simple statists when it came to the arts. Certainly, it is true that the case for a municipal theatre was a favourite theme with Charles Charrington and others when lecturing for the Society, and that Harley Granville Barker, Bernard Shaw, and Herbert Trench joined forces with William Archer and John Galsworthy to campaign for a national theatre in the early 1900s. By the mid-1900s, the Fabians were popularly associated with the (to many, inconceivable) proposal for a 'municipal theatre' subsidised by the State.[6] When more fully historicised within the context of contemporary debates about the role of the State in the theatre, however, it becomes apparent that these Fabians' outward preoccupation with the organisation and funding of England's theatres belongs to a larger story that has received little scholarly attention.[7]

In this, as in so many aspects of the Society's early history, scholars have overlooked the cultural legitimising strategies and traditions motivating the primary material from which they have extracted the Fabians' putative 'utilitarian' policies. When Granville Barker and Archer published *A National Theatre*—convenient evidence of a statist policy towards the arts—with Duckworth (after a private print of 1904), for instance, they in fact prefaced their practical 'schemes and estimates' with a long quotation from Matthew Arnold, calling for the foundation of a national theatre sponsored by the State. Reviewing a performance by a French company in Drury Lane,

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[5] Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism*, 193-195.
[6] Vivian, 'Pretended Labour Parties,' 153.
[7] William Archer and Harley Granville Barker, *A National Theatre: Scheme & Estimates* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1907).

Arnold had argued that a national theatre was necessary to protect the positive social function of drama against the 'Puritanical' resistance of the middle class. The long quotation they selected tied together excerpts from a *Nineteenth Century* article in which Arnold openly called for the institution of municipal and national theatre in England, organised with 'State subsidy and cooperation.'[8]

> 'We have in England everything to make us dissatisfied with the chaotic and ineffective condition into which our theatre has fallen. We have remembrance of better things past, and the elements for better things in the future…But we have been unlucky, as we so often are, in the work of organisation… "Forget"—can we not hear these fine artists saying in an undertone to us, amidst their graceful compliments of adieu!—"Forget your clap-trap, and believe that the State, the nation in its collective and corporate character, does well to concern itself about an influence so important to national life and manners as the theatre… The people will have the theatre; then make it a good one… The theatre is irresistible; organise the theatre!"'[9]

Arnold recognised that 'culture,' or 'sweetness and light' needed 'organisation' if it was effectively to palliate the mechanistic malaise and 'chaos,' or anarchy, of modern civilisation. Nowhere was this more pertinent than in the theatre, which Arnold believed exerted a real and powerful 'influence' over the 'national life and manners.' If Fabians like Charrington, Shaw, and Granville Barker followed Arnold in believing that the State should 'organise the theatre' for the good of the 'nation,' they did so because they similarly shared an Arnoldian conception of the theatre as a real and vital force for social criticism. Reconsidered in this context, the Fabians belong to a broader cultural tradition of statist liberalism in the arts that had antecedents in the nineteenth century, and an afterlife in the twentieth.

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One difficulty for the present chapter is that literary scholars who have approached the Fabians' 'support' for the 'new drama' as a symbolic, rather than an administrative or municipal, question, have tended in their enthusiasm to over-theorise the relationship

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[8] Matthew Arnold, 'The French Play in London,' *The Nineteenth Century* 6, no. 30 (1879), 228-43 (243).
[9] Archer and Barker, *A National Theatre: Scheme & Estimates*, ii.

between 'Fabianism' and the 'new theatre.' Philippa Burt's reading of Harley Granville Barker's Court Theatre 'ensemble' as a 'model of Fabian theatre,' for instance, exemplified the kind of overly deterministic interpretations produced when literary scholars apply Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production—best applied to explicit '*position-takings*' within the field—to individual acts of writing.[10] To justify her definition of 'Fabianism' as synonymous with the early ideas of Sidney Webb, Burt insisted that 'stronger affinities existed between Webb and Granville Barker' than between Granville Barker and Shaw because while the first two shared a 'fervent belief' in 'the importance of committees, Shaw tended to prize specialised individuals or "supermen" over committees.'[11] Burt's subsequent list of the 'striking similarities between the Fabian Society and Granville Barker's attempts to reform the theatre' proceeds along equally deterministic reasoning. Two examples set the tone: 'as Webb argued for a society not founded upon competition, so Granville Barker's permanent ensemble company aimed to establish a sense of equality and security among the actors'; and Granville Barker's desire to give his actors 'a greater sense of freedom than that allowed under the actor-manager "star" system' was a 'freedom for all, much like the universal freedom that Webb believed would arrive from socialism.'[12] This is at best an unhelpful evocation of Bourdieu's '*habitus*'—a 'system of dispositions' or 'structuring structures' that 'generate and organize practices without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends'—to justify a 'model of Fabian theatre' bridging the fields of literature and power.[13]

Indeed, it is significant for the present thesis that in fact we cannot reduce the diverse activities of the playwrights, managers, actors, and critics of the theatre

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[10] Philippa Burt, 'Granville Barker's Ensemble as a Model of Fabian Theatre,' *New Theatre Quarterly* 28, no. 04 (2012), 307-24.
[11] Burt, 'Granville Barker's Ensemble as a Model of Fabian Theatre,' 308.
[12] Burt, 'Granville Barker's Ensemble as a Model of Fabian Theatre,' 320, 316.
[13] 'The Field of Cultural Production,' Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 71; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 53.

associated with the Society to an identifiably 'Fabian' (and certainly not Webbian) programme. The Fabian Society no more provided a platform for a 'Fabian theatre' than it did for a 'Fabian' political party or even a 'Fabian' newspaper. As we have seen in earlier chapters, during the 1890s and 1900s the Society explicitly rejected these possibilities as contrary to its self-understanding as an autonomous and non-doctrinal body. Shaw explained this strategy in an 1899 affirmation of 'permeation': 'our mission is to Socialize the Press as we hope to Socialize Parliament and the other Estates of the realm, not to run the Press ourselves.'[14] It is not that the prevalence of dramatic professionals went unremarked within the Society's own ranks. Indeed, one member, recognising this demographic peculiarity, submitted a proposal for the establishment of a 'Fabian Dramatic Society' at an Executive committee meeting on 24 January 1908: the Executive rejected the proposal, resolving then and there that it 'cannot consent to the use of the name Fabian by a dramatic society.'[15] Harley Granville Barker himself, alongside Bernard Shaw, Leslie Haden Guest, and H. G Wells all served on the Executive committee that made this resolution. Not only did the dramatists who belonged to the Society never explicitly position themselves as 'Fabian playwrights,' or theorise a 'Fabian theatre,' the Society actively discouraged the over-institutionalisation of the consonances between the communities, just as it avoided over-institutionalisation through a dedicated 'Fabian' newspaper (in the model of *Justice*, for instance, or *Commonweal*) or the running of 'Fabian' candidates for Parliament.

Scholarship that undervalues the Fabians' prevalence in the 'new drama' as a simple story of municipal socialism, or a bourgeois 'histrionic impulse,' on the one hand, or that overtheorises a 'Fabian' aesthetic, on the other, are equally culpable in inadequately historicising the institutional, intellectual, and literary conditions at play in

[14] Shaw, *The Fabian Society*, 24.
[15] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book. C10, 24 January 1908, 158.

the Society and its members' self-understanding and representation.[16] When viewed from the perspective of cultural history, a different interpretation emerges that more adequately accounts for the conspicuous clustering of Fabian socialists around specific theatrical societies such as those listed in Jackson's history, and the broader campaign to abolish statutory censorship of the stage at the turn of the twentieth century.

The dramatists from the Fabian Society constituted a group not through subscription to any explicit 'Fabian' aesthetic, or 'homology' between 'Fabianism' and an idea of the theatre as a kind of democratic microcosm, but through a shared, liberal vision of the writer as an autonomous individual whose liberties and interests were threatened when Governmental anxieties over obscenity or social 'order' led to State interference in the arts. They come into being, that is, as a group—certainly not a 'Fabian' theatre or 'school'—through a shared negotiation of broader cultural, social, and political traditions. This negotiation may be broadly categorised as liberal in two senses: first, they participated in a liberal tradition of opposition to censorship inherited from the eighteenth-century debates over Walpole's Licensing Bill of 1737; and second, they upheld the liberal position, filtered through Arnoldian tradition, that the 'important' function of the theatre in 'national life and manners' warranted State support for a national theatre.

This proposition is not inconsistent with the arguments already laid out in this thesis. In their advocacy for public education, Matthew Arnold and the Fabians by necessity performed a conceptual balancing act construing the State as the guardian of liberal ideals. The State, with Arnold, was to be a 'centre' of 'light' *and* 'authority,' securing the 'best' for British students and teachers alike.[17] If they queried how best to 'organise' the 'authority' responsible for the education of the nation's young, so too did

[16] Britain, *Fabianism and Culture*, 210-18.
[17] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 117.

they recognise the need for a system of organisation to improve 'the chaotic and ineffectual condition' of theatrical life in England.

While the Fabian Society, through figures including Sidney Webb, Edith Nesbit, and Arthur Clutton-Brock, aligned its support for a national system of public education explicitly and implicitly with Arnold's legacy, however, when it came to question of the arts, and specifically the theatre, many Fabians were avowedly anti-statist. Indeed, in their suspicion of state intervention in the production of theatrical works, the Fabians considered below in fact offered a corrective to Arnold's idealistic notion of '*the State*' as a guardian of culture. While even Arnold retained a place for the Examiner of Plays (then Pigott) in his vision of the national theatre 'subsidised' by a cooperative State, the Fabians and their peers considered below held fast to the liberal stance that, in Bernard Shaw's words, the theatre was a sphere of 'human activity' that belonged wholly outside the limits of 'legal interference.'[18]

Theatrical Censorship and the Liberal 'Orthodoxy of Opposition'

> Every unnecessary Restraint on Licentiousness is a Fetter upon the Legs, is a Shackle upon the Hands of Liberty.[19]
>
> Lord Chesterfield, House of Lords speech in opposition to Walpole's Bill, 1737

Parliamentary and royal anxieties about the theatre have a long and documented history in Britain. Of particular significance for the practice of theatrical censorship at the turn of the twentieth century was the Licensing Bill passed by the House of Commons in 1737. Colloquially known as Walpole's Act, after Sir Robert Walpole who tabled the Bill, the Act conferred upon the Office of the Lord Chamberlain the power to censor all

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[18] Arnold, 'The French Play in London,' 243; Herbert Louis Samuel Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the stage Plays (Censorship)*, Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Reports and papers214] (London: Printed for H.M.S.O. by Wyman and Sons, 1909) [885] 46.

[19] 'Lord Chesterfield's speech in the House of Lords, 1737,' Appendix in Frank Fowell and Frank Palmer, *Censorship in England: its history from the fifteenth century* (London: Frank Palmer, 1913), 359.

scripts for 'Entertainment of the Stage'—including 'any Interlude, Tragedy, Comedy, Opera, Play,' or 'Farce'—intended for public production in England.[20] The spirit of the Act, which legislated control that had previously been practised by the Master of Revels under royal prerogative, was to empower the Lord Chamberlain to prohibit the production of treasonous, libellous, or obscene material in English theatres. While the Lord Chamberlain appointed to his staff an Examiner of Plays to oversee the censorship, however, his Office did not articulate any formal regulations for, or limitations upon, the Examiner's powers. Combined with the theatre managers' lack of recourse to appeal the Examiner's rulings, this omission was responsible for the shared and enduring objection among opponents of censorship that the power of the Examiner was both arbitrary and absolute, and that censorship was in principle and in spirit a breach of Common British Law.

Like the 'struggle' for national education, the tradition of opposition to the censorship of the theatre has deep roots that reflect this legislative history. On three occasions after the passage of the Theatres Act of 1843, which confirmed the 1737 Act, the Houses of Commons and Lords appointed a Joint Select Committee to investigate the 'provisions and application of the law relating to the Lord Chamberlain's Censorship over plays,' namely in 1853, 1866, and 1892.[21] Unsurprisingly, online databases of nineteenth-century periodicals and newspapers register a peak in press articles on theatrical censorship around these dates.[22] It is worth noting that in each instance, the push to reform licensing laws, and public discussions of its merits, came not only from

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[20] Great Britain, *The Statutes At Large: from Magna Charta to 1869* (Cambridge: Printed by Joseph Bentham, 1762 http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=OXVU1&docId=oxfaleph013110741) Vol.17, GII, c.28, 141-42 (41) 1 September 2014. Scanned monograph

[21] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, vii.

[22] British Periodicals Online, Reprint Edition: ProQuest LLC, 2014), http://search.proquest.com/britishperiodicals *Times Digital Archive*. Search terms: <theatre> AND/OR <stage> AND <censorship>.

the managers of the smaller theatres—after all, it was the managers of theatres who were required by law to submit plays to the Examiner—but more particularly from playwrights who felt their freedom of expression and professional practice was unduly compromised by an ill-defined and absolute censorship.[23] One consequence of statutory censorship, it can be argued, was that it encouraged something approximating a unionisation of dramatists early in the nineteenth century, engendering a group identity based on common interests that endured into the twentieth century, and that was not necessarily matched within writers practising other literary forms—novels, poetry anthologies, and indeed printed plays—not subject to statutory censorship. While Shaw and Wells were involved, of course, in the extant Society of Authors, founded the same year as the Fabian Society, this trade union differed from the dramatic community in the sense it was dedicated to protecting copyright and the commercial interests of writers, and signalled the professionalization, as Simon Eliot has argued, of the 'man of letters,' rather than serving as a focal point for a liberal defence of the arts against statutory or official censorship.[24]

This tradition of opposition is steeped in the rhetoric of liberalism, specifically English liberties, or the principle that the negative rights of all citizens—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, private property, and so forth—were guaranteed by the State. For the earliest opponents of theatrical censorship, it was not, or at least not primarily, a question of protecting an idea or ideal of literature, but of rights and precedent in law. After the second reading of Walpole's Bill on 28 May 1737, for instance, Lord William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, objected on principle to the clauses specifying the censorship of the stage as 'a certain preamble to the taking away the

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[23] David Thomas, David Carlton, and Anne Etienne, *Theatre Censorship: From Walpole to Wilson*, online ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53-4.
[24] Simon Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing, 1800-1919*, vol. 8, Occasional papers of the Bibliographical Society, (London: Bibliographical Society, 1994), 14.

Liberty of the Press in general.'[25] In the establishment of an identifiable tradition of opposition—something like what J. M. Coetzee called an 'orthodoxy of opposition to censorship'—in the British context, it was Lord Chesterfield whose legacy survived beyond the contemporary debates to become a key reference point in the nineteenth and twentieth century.[26] Objecting to the 'extraordinary Nature' of Walpole's censorship clause in terms of the precedent set by Common Law, Lord Chesterfield warned that the Bill, in its attempt to combat obscenity, in fact constituted a 'dangerous' threat to the principle of 'Liberty itself.'

> It seems designed not only as a Restraint on the Licentiousness of the Stage, but it will prove a most arbitrary Restraint on the Liberty of the Stage; and I fear, it looks yet farther, I fear, it tends towards a Restraint on the Liberty of the Press, which will be a long Stride towards the Destruction of Liberty itself.[27]

In a later section of his speech, Chesterfield extended this threat to an 'Encroachment on Property.' 'Wit,' he argued, 'is a Sort of Property,' and it is the 'duty' of the State 'to encourage and protect Wit, whosoever's Property it may be.'[28] Chesterfield framed his argument against censorship, therefore, through the balance of civil liberties and statutory duties: any legal restraint on the theatre that went beyond existing obscenity laws to which all citizens were already subject, or which infringed upon the rights of freedom of speech and the right to private property, was anti-Constitutional and on that basis, and that basis alone, ought not to reach the Statute books.

The cultural afterlife of Chesterfield's liberal opposition to censorship was secured through subsequent republications of his speech by others vested in the debates. Samuel Johnson, whose satirical *Compleat Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage* (1739) lauded Walpole's Act and offered a Swiftean recommendation that its

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[25] Thomas, Carlton, and Etienne, *Theatre Censorship: From Walpole to Wilson*, 37.
[26] J. M. Coetzee, 'Censorship and Polemic' (1990), quoted in Peter D. McDonald, *The Literature Police: apartheid censorship and its cultural consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 158.
[27] 'Lord Chesterfield's speech,' in Fowell and Palmer, *Censorship in England*, 357.
[28] 'Lord Chesterfield's speech,' in Fowell and Palmer, *Censorship in England*, 366.

mandate be extended to all walks of British social and political life, included a transcript of Chesterfield's speech in *Debates in Parliament* (1787).[29] Frank Fowell and Frank Palmer similarly reprinted a modernised and abridged transcript in *Censorship in England* (1913), a volume for which they particularly acknowledged Fabians Shaw, Granville Barker, and Frederick Whelen for their assistance.[30] Less stable textual reiterations are found in the periodical press throughout the nineteenth century. When the third Joint Select Committee investigating the censorship convened in 1892, for instance, William Archer, a respected Scottish critic and translator of Ibsen, evoked the liberal language of 'Autocracy' *versus* 'Liberty' in his opposition to the Censor with direct reference to this precedent:

> What Lord Chesterfield said in opposing Walpole's Act of 1737 remains incontrovertibly true to this day:— 'A power lodged in the hands of a single man, to judge and determine without limitation, control, or appeal, is a sort of power unknown to our laws, and inconsistent with our Constitution; it is a higher and more absolute power that we trust even to the king himself.'[31]

While Archer omitted Chesterfield's final resolution—'and therefore I must think we ought not to vest any such Power in his Majesty's Lord Chamberlain'—he maintained the causal link between the Act's anti-liberal clauses and 'extraordinary' status in English common law, and the need for reform.[32]

The polemic only intensified when the dramatic preoccupations of the 'modern' or 'new' drama that emerged in London in the early 1890s turned towards challenging, rather than reflecting, dominant social narratives. In an earlier 1891 article on 'The Free Stage and the New Drama,' Archer had explained the clash between the interests of the 'new drama' and censorship in terms that would become conventional for those who

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[29] Samuel Johnson, *Debates in Parliament* (London: British Library, 1787 http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW3304216808&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE) 230 22 July 2014. Digitized Monograph

[30] Fowell and Palmer, *Censorship in England*, v.

[31] William Archer, 'A Note on the Censorship,' *The New Review* 6, no. 36 (May 1892), 566-76 (566).

[32] 'Lord Chesterfield's speech,' in Fowell and Palmer, *Censorship in England*, 363.

identified with the movement. Charles Charrington's production of *A Doll's House* at the Novelty Theatre in 1889 was, Archer explained, 'unquestionably the birthday of the new movement' in England, bringing into being a 'point of contact between the stage and the higher intellectual life of the day.'[33] Fellow Fabians Ashley Dukes in *Modern Dramatists* (1911) and Holbrook Jackson in *The Eighteen Nineties* (1913) reiterated this chronology and interpretation.[34] The difficulty, as they conceived it, is that this 'higher intellectual life' affronted the common life, the everyday *mores* and 'prejudices' of the English public. The 'Censor swoop[ed] down on unconventional ethics,' Archer warned, as the 'reactionary critics rushed' up 'to the Lord Chamberlain,' both shielding the 'average intelligence' from the 'shock' of a 'novel art' and a 'novel morality.' Embedded in Archer's description of the clash between the 'average' and the 'higher intelligence' (we think of Arnold's 'aliens,' or 'best selves') is a liberal conception of the possibilities of the theatre in its 'highest' form, namely that it served to further human experience by giving space to the fullest expression of the problems of 'modern life.'

If Archer's plea fell on deaf ears in 1892, his rhetoric nonetheless carried the liberal tradition to the close of the nineteenth century, when a set of events sparked renewed calls for legislative reform. The Examiner of Plays, George Alexander Redford, himself catalysed this protest when he refused a public production licence to two new plays late in 1906 and early 1907: Edward Garnett's *The Breaking Point*, and Harley Granville Barker's *Waste*. Both by Fabian socialists, and both dramatising the human crises precipitated by unwanted pregnancy, these plays spurred Redford to act, as stipulated by the 1843 Act, 'for the promotion of good manners and decorum, or for the

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[33] William Archer, 'The Free Stage and the New Drama,' *Fortnightly Review* 50, no. 299 (1891), 663-72 (665, 67, 68).
[34] Ashley Dukes, *Modern Dramatists* (London: Frank Palmer, 1911) 38; Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 207.

public peace.'[35] As one 'correspondent' to the *Times* explained, however, Redford's 'arbitrary' ruling, and seeming insensitivity to the possibility that dramatic representation of moral dilemmas did not imply endorsement, galvanised the literary community into action:

> The recent refusal of a licence to Mr. Garnett's *The Breaking Point* and to Mr. Barker's play *Waste*, followed by the protest, signed by Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Meredith, Mr. Hardy, and Mr. Frederic Harrison, and by prominent writers for the stage, including such men as Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. J. M. Barrie, Mr. Pinero, and Mr. Gilbert Murray, against the Office of the Censor, serves to call attention to certain admitted weaknesses in our English censorship.[36]

The 'protest' to which the correspondent alluded was a petition submitted to the Home Office formally requesting an audience with the Prime Minister to address the concerns of the mentioned 'prominent writers.' This correspondence was printed below an open letter by the relevant writers communicating to *Times* readers their petition, and outlining a statement of their requests. While this protest failed to secure the desired meeting, two years later, in 1909, it provided a point of evidence when the Houses of Commons and Lords appointed yet another Joint Select Committee to investigate the application of the statutory censorship of the theatre. These two moments in the history of British censorship provide a useful point of entry for examining the kinds of arguments that the dramatists lodged against statutory censorship in the public view.

Against Censorship

We can look first to the dramatists' letter of petition from October 1907, printed alongside the above correspondence. Signed by 'practically every dramatic author' of note, this letter is not so much an aesthetic manifesto as an invocation of the liberal ideals of equality and liberty in the name of a 'free' theatre. Signatories included

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[35] Hansard, Theatre Regulations, 14 August 1843, Reprint Edition: Commons and Lords Libraries, 1803-2005), http://1843/aug/14/theatre-regulations#S3V0071P0_18430814_HOLR2_13, accessed 1 September 2014.
[36] 'Correspondent', 'The Censorship Of Plays,' *The Times* (29 October 1907), 15.

playwrights Granville Barker, Shaw, Garnett, Galsworthy, Arthur Pinero, and Henry Arthur Jones, novelists Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James, as well as poets W. B. Yeats and Arthur Swinburne. Operating at a time before State subsidies for the arts were widely considered a genuine possibility—state funding for education, of course, being still a matter of debate—the 'prominent' signatories asked first and foremost for the State to protect their right to practice as dramatists free from any 'arbitrary' legal interference. The authors announced their intention to lodge a 'formal protest,' for instance, against the Office of the Lord Chamberlain, which they described as 'an office autocratic in procedure, opposed to the spirit of the Constitution, contrary to common justice and to common sense.'[37] Their objection, which clearly participated in the established liberal rhetoric of opposition seen in earlier accounts, that such censorship was 'autocratic,' anti-Constitutional, and unjust, informed the specific clauses of the protest. Without attribution, they paraphrased the same section of Chesterfield's speech that Archer had quoted in his 1891 article: the dramatists 'protest against the power lodged in the hands of a single official—who judges without a public hearing, and against whose dictum there is no appeal.' The seventy-one signatories then asked both 'that their art be placed on the same footing as every other art' *not* subject to statutory censorship, and 'that they themselves be placed in the position enjoyed under the law by every other citizen.'[38]

That this protest was not, or not primarily, a contest of high/low theatre but an argument based on negative rights was endorsed by William Archer's proposition that its signatories constituted a 'Trade Union' of dramatists.[39] 'Popular' dramatists signed alongside 'modern' ones, Pinero alongside Shaw, Jones alongside Granville Barker. If the

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[37] George Bancroft and et al., 'The Censorship Of Plays,' *The Times* (29 October 1907), 15.
[38] Bancroft and al., 'The Censorship Of Plays,' 15.
[39] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, [864] 45.

degree of organisation implied in the 'Trade Union' overstated the case somewhat, there was undeniably the sense among these early twentieth-century dramatists (as there had been among their nineteenth-century predecessors) that their art was subject to extraordinary and arbitrary regulation, and that a corporate response was thus warranted. In a 'Letter to the Censor' printed as a preface to *The Breaking Point*, Garnett channelled this sentiment, calling for the establishment of the Society for the Defence of Intellectual Drama.[40] Garnett's definition of the 'intellectual drama' in his 'Letter' as a 'drama that is a criticism of life' suggests once more Matthew Arnold as a precursor for this polemic.[41] Arnold famously described poetry as 'a criticism of life,' a criterion derided by W. B. Yeats but upheld here by Garnett in justification of a dramatic form that confronted rather than confirmed the audience's social attitudes.[42] As explored below, Garnett's argument that the dramatist's right to offer a 'criticism of life' required protection from State interference anticipated later twentieth-century attempts to balance a liberal concept of the arts with the desire for State patronage and 'cooperation.'

As with earlier campaigns to abolish statutory censorship, however, the 'formal protest' of 1907 proved abortive. The meeting with the Prime Minister never eventuated, and statutory censorship continued as it had since 1737. In 1909, however, the House of Lords and the Commons once again capitulated to pressure from the dramatists to reconsider the censorship: yet another Joint Select Committee was convened. In the inquiry, not all seventy-one signatories presented evidence, there being

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[40] Edward Garnett, *A Censured Play: The Breaking Point, with a Preface and a Letter to the Censor* (London 1907), xviii.
[41] 'Preface,' Garnett, *The Breaking Point*, ix.
[42] W. B. Yeats to Richard Ashe King, 5 August 1897, in W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 130. 'The third principle is that art is not a criticism of life but a revelation of the realities that are behind life. It has no direct relation with morals. It does not seek to make us see life wisely or sanely or clearly as the moralists believe; but it make[s] us see God & there is no vision that runs to the head & makes the feet unsure like that.'

a total of forty-nine witnesses including not only playwrights and managers, but also the Bishop of Southwark, clerks from the Home Office, and the Examiner of Plays himself.[43]

Described as 'one of the most chaotic and puzzling volumes that has ever been offered to the public,' the official Report from this inquiry, issued on 11 November 1909, is a spectacular aggregate of some of these dramatists' views on the purpose and potential of the 'new drama' as distinct from the 'commercial' or 'popular' theatre, the role of the State in the arts, and theories of dramatic treatment and morality.[44] The Report makes it possible to analyse which rhetorical strategies the dramatists used severally and collectively under questioning. While the writers, frequently at the instigation of their parliamentary interrogators, did involve themselves in specialist questions over literary merit and the nuances of 'dramatic treatment,' for the most part, or at least the most effective part, they attempted to universalise their position from a question of literature to one of liberties. As Bernard Shaw, with more than a hint of 'Fabianism,' insisted, 'the question of censorship or no censorship is a question of high political principle and not of petty policy.'[45]

The *Times* covered the lengthy parliamentary proceedings for readers in its Court Circular columns in such a way that clearly prioritised the dramatists' perspective on the debate. This is highlighted particularly in a transcript of Galsworthy's hearing, and the 'letters from literary men' whose opinions he had solicited before the inquiry to share with the Committee. This brought the names of some of the period's leading writers into the courtroom, including Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett,

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[43] G. A. Redford (Examiner of Plays) and John Galsworthy, 'Dramatic Censorship,' *The Times*, no. 6 (1909), 6; Harry B. Poland and Barker H. Granville, 'Dramatic Censorship,' *The Times*, no. 12 (1909), 12; Shaw G. Bernard, 'Dramatic Censorship,' *The Times*, no. 8 (1909), 8.
[44] Jonathon Green and Nicholas Karolides, *Encyclopedia of Censorship*, 2nd ed. (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2005), 304.
[45] Bernard Shaw, 'The Select Committee On The Censorship,' *The Times*, no. 6 (1909), 6.

and H. G. Wells.[46] The *Times* also functioned as a platform for witnesses and the Examiner to fire shots across less official bows. Shaw, Granville Barker, and Galsworthy each engaged the Examiner through letters to the editor responding to the newspaper's coverage of the proceedings. Redford himself wrote back. The tone of these letters is snappier than the Report, and in fact lowered the level of debate to quibbles over the Examiner's exact title. It did, however, provide a useful platform for soliciting public support. Shaw in particular used a letter to the *Times* editor as an opportunity to republish and popularise excerpts from his own 'censored' 'Statement of Evidence,' a fifty-five page 'pamphlet' outlining his views on censorship which the Committee refused to hear as evidence or to publish in the final Report.

The *Times* editorialised the proceedings as a narrative of so many Davids and Goliath, casting the writers as champions of liberty fighting for their rights against a Parliament upholding an arbitrary and absolute law. 'We rub our eyes,' Henry James had written in his letter to Galsworthy printed in the *Times*, 'we writers accustomed to freedom in all other walks of life, to think that the cause has still to be argued in England.'[47] Conrad too denounced the censorship as 'an outrage upon the dignity and honesty of the calling,' and 'a disgrace to the tone, to the character of this country's civilization.' H. G. Wells was blunter, writing that 'the Censorship with its quite wanton power of suppression has always been one of the reasons why I haven't ventured into playwriting.' The image that the writers, and through them the *Times*, crafted for the public was that of bewildered and beleaguered literary writer under siege from an overly officious government.

It was an image that the 'new' dramatists involved in the inquiry, particularly Shaw and Granville Barker, cultivated to full effect. These playwrights, and their

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[46] 'The Dramatic Censorship: John Galsworthy's Evidence,' *The Times*, no. 4 (1909), 4.
[47] 'The Dramatic Censorship: John Galsworthy's Evidence,' 4.

colleague and fellow Fabian Frederick Whelen, deliberately universalised their opposition, speaking not to literary principles but to liberal values. Shaw, for instance, opened his 'Statement' with an affirmation of 'the need for setting certain departments of human activity entirely free from legal interference.' Unsurprisingly, Shaw insisted that the theatre was one such sphere of 'human activity.' Asked by the chairman why this affirmation of autonomy ought to apply 'especially to the drama and dramatists,' Shaw stated it was a matter of 'liberty of the Press, liberty of speech, and liberty of conscience.'[48] With uncharacteristic directness, he therefore signalled from the outset a liberal vantage point to which he remained faithful throughout his testimony. Asked, for instance, if this liberal stance was not contrary to his 'desire to bring them ['drama and dramatists'] under further control,' Shaw replied in a clear affirmation of liberalism: 'No, because I conceive the law to be the guarantee of liberty.' As touched on further below, Herbert Samuel's query, and Shaw's rejoinder, pointed to an enduring tension sustained by many champions of the 'free stage': they sought not merely 'negative' protection, or freedom from censorship, but 'positive' State support, or freedom to write for the stage as they wished. This marked a movement from classic Victorian liberalism to what might be called Fabian, later social-democratic, liberalism.

When Harley Granville Barker took the stand on 5 August, he too participated in this evolving version of the liberal tradition. When asked if he thought there 'ought to be no control at all' over the plays produced in London, he replied in terms recalling Chesterfield's own objection that any 'unnecessary' extension of existing obscenity laws was anti-constitutional: 'I think that the ordinary customs referred to in public speaking and writing in England, translated into law, would be amply sufficient to safeguard the

[48] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, 46.

public' from offensive material.[49] Shaw had expressed much the same view, stating, 'I object to any control of the theatre that is not the ordinary control which is applied to all citizens,' and, 'I object to a control of the theatre, which excludes rights which are accorded to all other citizens in the conduct of their business and the pursuit of their livelihood.'[50]

Frederick Whelen, too, when called upon as chairman of the Stage Society to explain his views on censorship, stated his case in openly liberal terms. In an excerpt from the testimony relayed to the public by the *Times* reporter, Whelen stated, 'Personally, I think any form of Censorship an outrage upon liberty.'[51] He elaborated on the basis of equal civil rights, 'I think that the manager of a theatre should have as much liberty as the manager of a newspaper to select the works which he desires should appear at his theatre.' Whelen also drew attention to a striking feature of the practice of censorship in England. Explaining that the Stage Society was founded with 'the object of promoting the dramatic art and serving an experimental theatre,' he noted before the enquiry that of the thirty-nine English plays that the Society had produced since its foundation, the four that had been refused a licence by the Censor had a common Fabian element: *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Waste*, *The Breaking Point*, and a now-forgotten play by Sydney Olivier called *Mrs. Maxwell's Marriage*.

It is worth noting that not all dramatists testifying at the enquiry followed Shaw, Granville Barker, and Whelen in their absolute rejection of the censorship as intractably anti-constitutional. A recurrent question put to witnesses by the members of Parliament was whether or not a reorganised censorship would be tenable. Some, such as Pinero, recommended including literary representatives on a board of censors, or establishing a

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[49] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, [1234] 72.
[50] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, 46.
[51] 'The Dramatic Censorship: Frederick Whelen's Evidence,' *The Times*, no. 4 (1909), 4.

court of appeal for dramatists and managers whose productions had been banned. Granville Barker, when this question was put to him, however, rejected the possibility of a reconstituted censorship outright, noting simply that 'no Secretary of State would take over such arbitrary powers as are now granted to the Lord Chamberlain.'[52] With palpable *double entendre*, he added that in the banning of his own play *Waste*—which more than any other play was referred to throughout the inquiry as a case in point—he had 'no right to question [the Censor's] decision in any way.'[53] There was no sense among the dramatists considered here of a concessionary liberal posturing or capitulation. As a matter of 'high political principle,' with Shaw, they opposed censorship absolutely.

This narrative, particularly the *Times* preoccupation with the literary personalities of Shaw, Granville Barker, and Garnett, was reflected elsewhere in press responses to the censorship debates. As William Archer had testified to the 1909 Committee, 'of living English authors,' Shaw and Granville Barker were 'decidedly the most prominent who have suffered at the hand of the Censor.'[54] Archer added Garnett as an afterthought, noting that *The Breaking Point* was a recurrent talking point throughout the proceedings. For better and for worse, the popular perception of the debate was shaped, as Holbrook Jackson had suggested, by the conspicuous crossovers between these Fabian 'intellectuals,' the 'new drama,' and the practice of censorship itself. A *New Age* cover illustration from February 1910 gave this perception pictorial form. Entitled 'The Censorship,' the illustration features a behatted parson, flanked by a faceless public huddled under the frontispiece of the 'FREE LIBRARY,' tossing an edition of the journal onto a burning pyre of books (Image 2). Among the clutter of open spines and bindings,

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[52] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, [1246] 74.
[53] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, [1231] 72.
[54] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, [779] 41.

seven distinct titles are legible: Granville Barker's *Waste*, Garnett's *The Breaking Point*, Shaw's *Blanco Posnet* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, alongside Wells's *Ann Veronica*, Henry James' *Italian Hours*, and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. And again, in 1912 when the dramatists circulated another formal petition through the dailies—this time addressing the King himself after the abortive follow-up to the 1909 Report—one *Academy* reviewer railed against the 'hectic dramatists who sign petitions against the Censorship and advertise like Labour members.' 'Save us,' the reviewer pleaded, 'oh! save us from these Shavians, these propagandists, these petition-signers.'[55] It is not as Fabians but as writers unified in opposition to the censorship of the public and the State that this group emerges: a negative identity of opposition rather than a positive one of subscription or charismatic leadership.

[55] 'The Theatre,' *The Academy*, no. 2081 (1912), 367-68 (368).

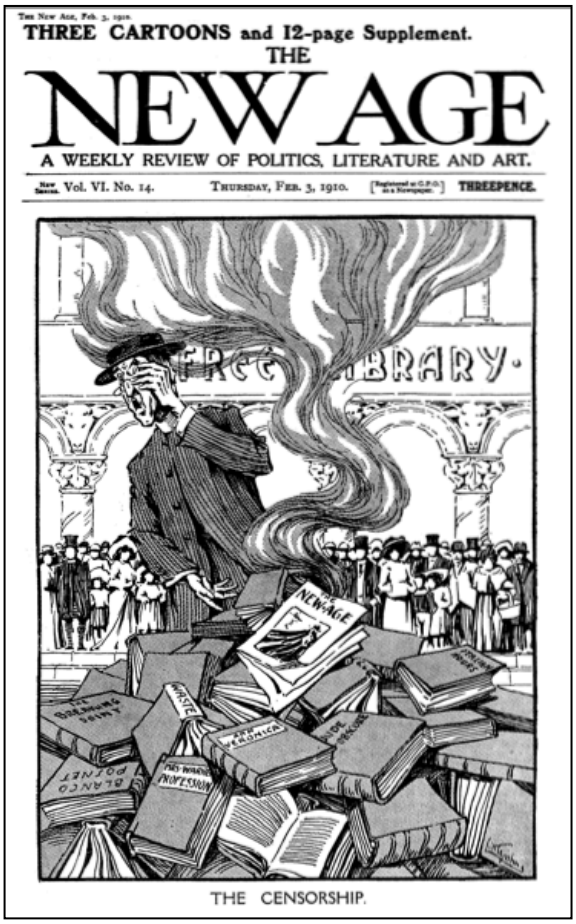

Image 2 Littlejohns, 'The Censorship,' *New Age* 6:14 (3 February 1910)

The 'Intellectual' Drama

Despite the 'new dramatists'' strategy of reorienting the debates away from inestimable questions of literary merit towards universalised liberties, there is nonetheless within this discourse a discernible high-mindedness about the function and value of the theatre. The distinction of the 'thinking-theatre,' we recall from Henley circle's polemic in Part 1 of this thesis, was a feature from the earliest negotiations over what 'Fabianism' meant for the English reading public in the early 1890s. By the 1910s, this seminal association had become a cultural commonplace. When Trotter, one of the drama critics in Bernard Shaw's *Fanny's First Play* (1911), interjected, for instance, that he assumed Arthur Pinero 'was much too popular for the Cambridge Fabian Society,' Shaw's joke succeeded because this self-conscious liberal elitism was embedded in his audience's understanding of the relationship between Fanny's Fabian circles, the

'modern' theatre with which they identified, and the broader social, cultural, and political contexts in which debates about literary value and censorship were played out.[56] Although Shaw caricatured this posturing of the liberal elite in his 'potboiler,' he simultaneously confirmed the recognition of a popular/modern distinction necessary for his joke to succeed.

Whatever their resistance to the idea of the State as moral arbiter, the 'new,' or 'intellectual' dramatists took seriously the idea that censorship was not only a threat to the development of 'modern' drama, but to the positive social, and indeed moral, function that the theatre fulfilled for society. This idea underpinned Garnett's definition of the 'intellectual drama' as a 'criticism of life' that could, at its best, be a force towards moral rejuvenation and the advancement of human values. To censor the drama was, by extension, to pickle the public in the dominant *mores* of the day. Embedded within distinctions between 'popular' and 'intellectual' theatre were not simply questions of dramatic convention or plot, therefore, but of the kinds and degrees of claims that dramatists were prepared to make for their art in a social context.

To stay, for the moment, with Garnett, we can see this progression from an Arnoldian conception of the function of ('intellectual') drama towards the opposition to the censorship on moral grounds at play in an article he contributed to the *Fortnightly* review in 1909. In 'The Censorship of Public Opinion,' which condemned Redford's banning of *Waste* (which Frederick Harrison accepted for the *Haymarket Theatre* on the 'highest grounds possible,' namely 'that the play was an artistic, not a commercial, product'), *The Breaking Point*, and other 'modern' works, Garnett claimed that contrary to his popular contemporaries, the 'new dramatist' succeeds in 'breaking through the conventional surface of things,' and 'challenging [the audience's] attention on

[56] Bernard Shaw, *Misalliance ; The dark lady of the Sonnets, and Fanny's first play : with a treatise on parents and children* (London: Constable, 1914), 249-50.

fundamental moral issues of our social life.'[57] In terms that recalled George Gissing's rejection of the shared ideology between author and reader implicit in Victorian realism, Garnett argued for a literature that confronted rather than confirmed the dominant *mores* of society and narratives of history.[58] 'This is the principle on which art and literature are free,' he insisted (again, with echoes of Arnold's 'better selves'): 'that a censorship must necessarily embody and crystallise the ideas and prejudices of the average person; whereas it is the aim of art to transcend those ideas and prejudices.' Riddled with Arnoldian phrases like 'mental barbarism,' 'Philistine audience,' and the 'Puritanism in the national life,' Garnett's argument is itself essentially moral: censorship, in retarding 'the development of a fine national drama,' limits the moral development of society itself, forever suspending the English public in its own 'conventional, false, worldly-wise standards.'[59]

An exaggerated expression of this distinction between a 'popular' drama of entertainment and a 'new' or 'intellectual drama' of edification, and the correlative consequence of censorship, is found in a *New Age* article entitled 'The Menace of the Censorship' that had appeared in response to the banning of *The Breaking Point* in 1907. This article was likely written by Leslie Haden Guest or his successor as drama critic for the *New Age* Ashley Dukes, both of whom knew Garnett through their Fabian circles, and both of whom 'disregarded' the West End in preference for productions of 'new drama,' particularly plays by Ibsen, Shaw, Galsworthy, and Granville Barker.[60] While the

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[57] Edward Garnett, 'The Censorship of Public Opinion,' *Fortnightly Review* 86, no. 511 (July 1909), 137-48 (138); and 'Preface,' in Garnett, *The Breaking Point*, ix.
[58] George Gissing, 'The Place of Realism in Fiction,' London: 1895, in George Gissing, *George Gissing on Fiction* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1978), 84-86.
[59] Garnett, 'The Censorship of Public Opinion,' 145.
[60] Wallace Martin, *The New Age Under Orage: chapters in English cultural history* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 73.

'popular' drama was 'entertainment,' the 'serious' drama, this article stated, was a 'powerful' force of social advancement: therein lay the 'menace of censorship.'

> The latest act of Mr. Redford, Censor of Plays, makes it abundantly clear that his office constitutes a public danger. It is not merely the development of an intellectual drama in England that is in peril, but what is of more concern, the stage as the most powerful engine of moral reform is being slowly reduced to nullity.[61]

Like Garnett and his contemporaries who shared this liberal view of the theatre, this *New Age* critic effectively turned the moral arguments made by defenders of censorship upon the Examiner of Plays: it is not the modern dramatist who explores 'unconventional morality' who represented a 'public danger,' but the Censor himself, who in stifling the 'intellectual drama' and enforcing conformity with the *status quo* stalled the greatest 'engine of moral reform.'

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Using a broader cultural-historical analysis, however, we can interpret anew the conditions behind the formation of the private subscriptions theatres of the 'new theatre,' and the aspirations of the 'new dramatists' relative to the 'average' viewing public. In a lecture to the *Times* literary club on 'The Theatre: the next phase,' delivered on 9 June 1910, Granville Barker argued for the establishment of 'a free and national theatre' that would make the 'new drama' accessible and relevant to all. What its 'enemies' called the '"advanced" or "intellectual"' theatre' should in fact, Granville Barker argued in a transcript subsequently published in the *English Review*, be known as the 'normal theatre.' The 'normal theatre,' it became clear, was by name and implication simply the 'intellectual' theatre normalised and legitimised by its affiliation with a national repertory, stripped of its elitist connotations and reconceptualised for a broader audience. 'By cultivating a good taste'—the implied aim of the national theatre—'we could tell the normal drama when it saw it.' While the 'normal drama'

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[61] 'The Menace of Censorship,' *The New Age* 1, no. 24 (10 October 1907), 373.

tried, for instance, 'to present an undistorted view of life,' its 'popular' counterpart 'pretended that nine-tenths of a man's life before marriage was devoted to making love,' or that 'that was the only occupation and interest a woman had.'[62] Without shedding the aims of the 'intellectual' theatre—a 'criticism of life' that could edify the public—Granville Barker sought to assimilate it within a popular, public theatre free, he stipulated, from 'Censorship.'

Granville Barker's attempt to rebrand the 'intellectual' as 'normal' gives cause to reconsider the customary interpretation of the 'elitist' ambitions of the 'new dramatists.' It was not simply that proponents of the 'new theatre' who founded the ITS, Stage Society, and New Century Theatres desired a 'restricted' space, with Bourdieu, for their art free from commercial interests and popular taste. Rather, statutory censorship forced these dramatists and managers into a highly 'restricted' space that, far from providing them with an aesthetic sanctuary in which to pursue their art uncorrupted by public taste, actually 'checked,' as Granville Barker had argued in the 1909 enquiry, the full and free development of 'original drama.'[63] William Archer too protested against the prevalent supposition that the 'new drama' comprised a 'private body of art lovers, who ask only to be left alone to take their artistic pleasures in peace.' In 'The Free Stage and the New Drama,' Archer argued that such a view—which we find reiterated in Burt's overly deterministic explanation that because the Fabian Society was 'elite' and 'anti-populist' so too was Granville Barker's Court Theatre—fundamentally mistook the nature of modern theatre, and the aspirations of modern dramatists.

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[62] Harley Granville-Barker, 'The Theatre: The Next Phase,' *The English Review* (1910), 631-48 (640-41).
[63] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, [1225] 71.

> The drama is essentially a social art. It cannot draw breath of life in such an austere, airless seclusion. It demands an atmosphere of open appreciation and dissent. In a word, it exists to be discussed and criticised.[64]

While it would of course be 'possible,' therefore, 'to place the Independent Theatre on the basis of a club, not to invite the press to its performances,' such a move would 'deprecate discussion and criticism,' limit the freedom of the press, and misconstrue the nature of 'theatre' itself. The significance of Archer's perspective is the proposal that 'new dramatists' were forced into the 'airless seclusion' of the subscription theatres by the anti-liberal priorities of statutory censorship: they neither welcomed their isolation from popular audiences and critics, nor deliberately sought to institute an exclusive theatrical space to reflect an elite, socialist identity. A 'free stage,' Archer concluded, could only exist when these anti-liberal tendencies were lifted, and the 'new drama' could enter the public domain. While Archer acknowledged, in explicitly Arnoldian terms, that only 'a certain "remnant"' of that public would attend this theatre, the essential question was one of the unfettered freedom of dramatists to write, managers to produce, and the viewing public to spectate *if they so chose*, without 'autocratic' interference from the State.[65]

A 'Free Stage' and a National Theatre?

Granville Barker's vision of a national theatre free from censorship and dedicated to bringing 'normal' (which is to say, 'intellectual') drama to the English public constituted a heady fusion of a liberal 'orthodoxy of opposition,' and an Arnoldian conception of the value of the theatre as an important social—and national—influence worthy of State patronage. This kind of statist liberalism brought upon the advocates of the 'free stage' the kind of charges of conceptual confusion that, we saw above, Bernard Shaw found

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[64] Archer, 'The Free Stage and the New Drama,' 668.
[65] Archer, 'The Free Stage and the New Drama,' 670.

himself quizzed on in the 1909 enquiry. How could Shaw argue, Chairman Herbert Samuel had queried, that the 'theatre' was a sphere of 'human activity' entirely autonomous from 'legal interference,' on the one hand, while demanding, on the other, that the State regulate writers' rights and workplace through subsidies for theatres? Shaw's response—that he 'conceived the law to be the guarantee of liberty'—shows the complex motivations that enlivened his own position.

Shaw and his contemporaries involved in the campaign for a 'free stage' nursed these seemingly incongruous motivations, seeking to guarantee a liberal conception of the fundamental autonomy of the stage through State mechanisms. They articulated a positive kind of statist liberalism, that is, under which the law guaranteed the rights of the playwright: rights that encompassed, with Shaw, not just a 'free stage,' but 'liberty of the Press, liberty of Speech, and liberty of Conscience,' and, indeed, liberty itself.[66] With Archer and Granville Barker, the 'duty' of the State was to safeguard the manager and the playwright's freedom, as citizens, to practice professionally, and not to patronise the public by limiting its access to the theatre under the guise of protecting it against 'licentious' material. Organisation was necessary to enable those within the dramatic community the possibility of developing their art to its highest potential, and, as the epithet from *A National Theatre* illustrated, many from within this community recognised that theirs was a position for which Matthew Arnold was a recognised precursor.

Shaw, Granville Barker, Herbert Trench, and Frederick Whelen in particular publicly and repeatedly argued that the State should subsidise the theatre because of the incalculable social benefit it brought to English society. Shaw, in a letter to the *Times* published a few months before the Joint Select Committee of 1909, explained this liberal

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[66] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, 46.

conundrum. 'The theatre,' Shaw claimed in Arnoldian overtones, 'is literally making the minds of our urban populations to-day. It is a huge factory of sentiment, of character, of points of honour, of conceptions of conduct, of everything that finally determines the destiny of a nation.'[67] While this theatrical 'factory' had greater administrative costs than other arts, so too did it confer greater social benefits:

> But the profit to the public, to the theatre as an institution, to the culture of London has been worth, at the most modest estimate, five times the deficit; and if London had any corporate conscience, or the nation any honesty in the matter of artistic services, the County Council and Mr. Lloyd-George would dispute for precedence in making a grant to Mr. Vedrenne, Mr. Barker, and myself to repay us at least our out-of-pocket expenses.[68]

These dramatists reconciled their desire for State subsidies with their liberal opposition to State interference in artistic practice in terms that ultimately brought moral arguments back into play. Shaw cast the theatre here as an 'artistic service,' not in the baldly utilitarian sense that Livesey and Waters would have it but in the sense that church also provided a public 'service.' Far from being a place of 'amusement,' 'the theatre is a place of culture, a place where people learn how to think, act, and feel; more important than all the schools in Christendom.' The theatre 'literally' shaped society, and was therefore as deserving—in fact, Shaw argued it was *more* deserving—of State funding as elementary and secondary schools.

In his lecture to the *Times* literary society, Granville Barker remarked that 'we have but lately begun to feel our way in England to a method of establishing and promoting the Arts and Sciences in a democratic state.' While it is obvious 'enough that something must be done, that such things belong to good government,' England continues to 'mean well and muddle.'[69] Elsewhere, too, he argued that 'the national theatre project was an assertion that the dignity of the theatre in England was part of

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[67] Bernard Shaw, 'The National Shakespeare Theatre And The New Repertory Theatres,' *The Times*, no. 38955 (May 1909), 12.
[68] Shaw, 'The National Shakespeare Theatre And The New Repertory Theatres,' 12.
[69] Granville-Barker, 'The Theatre: The Next Phase,' 633.

the national dignity.'[70] And again, in a 1901 lecture on the National theatre at the Hampstead meeting of the Fabian Society reported in the *Times*, 'the theatre had a strong claim on our social service if we chose to make it so.'[71] Shaw and Granville Barker's liberalism extended beyond the principle of the 'Liberty' of the 'Stage,' towards an understanding about the very function of theatre as a (potential) social good and a vehicle of moral reform. Like Shaw, Granville Barker concluded in terms that recall Arnold's 1879 plea for a national theatre that London needed 'a national theatre,' and the 'big cities municipal theatres,' to protect this 'social service' that the 'higher' theatre provided.[72]

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If the liberal opposition to censorship had a precedent rooted in the eighteenth century, so too did it have an afterlife in the twentieth. Despite the 'formal protest' of 1907, the Joint Select Committees of 1892 and 1909, and the protest to the King of 1912, the Lord Chamberlain's prerogative to censor the stage remained in the Statute books until abolished by the Theatres Act of 1968. The social, political, and cultural boundaries that these Fabians tried to mediate—liberal arts supported with State funds and protected by State guarantees—endured well into the twentieth century.

Through this lineage we can approach this episode as a precursor to the debates surrounding the ultimate abolition of statutory censorship in 1968. The Arts Council, as Randall Stevenson commented, was founded on the Arnoldian-inflected 'slogans' of securing the 'enjoyment of the "high" arts by a wide public,' and providing 'the best for the most.'[73] Peter D. McDonald has show how this 'Arnoldian tradition'—both in its

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[70] 'Mr. Granville Barker On The Theatre,' *The Times*, no. 39295 (1910), 12.
[71] 'A National Theatre,' *The Times*, no. 39131 (1909), 14.
[72] Arnold, 'The French Play in London,' 240.
[73] Randall Stevenson, *The Last of England?* , 13 vols., vol. 12: 1960-2000, The Oxford English Literary History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33.

institutional setting in the Arts Council, and in individuals like the publisher John Calder who served it—was motivated by 'contradictory energies' of anti-statism and State cooperation. McDonald developed Stevenson's observation, writing that while Calder was 'a modernist with an Arnoldian sense of public vocation,' so too was he 'a liberal committed to state patronage, an anti-moralist who defended the *avant-garde* on moral grounds, a democrat who believed passionately in the guardianship of the elite.'[74] A like confluence of 'contradictory energies' motivated the Council itself, which, 'despite its Keynseian origins and its commitment to state patronage the Council' adopted under Chairman Goodman (1965 to 1972) 'a determinedly liberal, anti-statist position which Calder actively supported when it came to censorship.'[75] We can trace, alongside the 'orthodoxy of opposition' to statutory censorship, a parallel tradition that balances a liberal view on the autonomy of the arts with a conviction that 'the State,' with Arnold, 'should concern itself' with cultural 'influences' upon 'national life and manners.' Far from being concerned merely with the latter, administrative side of this equation, the Fabians considered above showed themselves to be deeply invested in the liberal defence of the arts, and the rights of the artist, as a matter of 'high' principle.

[74] Peter D. McDonald, 'Calder's Beckett,' in *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, ed. Mark Nixon (London: British Library, 2011), 153-69 (160).
[75] McDonald, 'Calder's Beckett,' 158.

5 Fabian 'Philistines' *versus* Russian 'Revolutionaries'?: Cultural Internationalism before the First World War

> How terribly backward these people are, burdened as they are with the heavy load of bourgeois prejudices! Their arrogance, a delayed reflex of the great historical role of the British bourgeoisie, does not permit them to interest themselves as they ought in the life of other nations, in new ideological phenomena and in the historical process which is rolling past over their heads. Narrow routinists, empiricists blinkered by bourgeois public opinion, these gentlemen betake themselves and their prejudices around the world and contrive to see nothing around them except themselves. Lenin had lived in every country of Europe, mastered foreign languages, read, studied, listened, investigated, compared, and generalized. While leading a great revolutionary country he would not waste any opportunity to learn, inquire and find out, attentively and conscientiously.[1]
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> Leon Trotsky, 'A Philistine on a Revolutionary: Review of H. G. Wells' (1924)

In 'A Philistine on a Revolutionary,' a review of an essay H. G. Wells published after meeting Vladimir Lenin in Moscow in 1920, Leon Trotsky denounced Wells as the archetypal Fabian socialist. With characteristically vivid language, Trotsky evoked the Arnoldian class marker of the new, industrial 'British bourgeoisie' to contrast the parochial Fabian 'Philistine' to the cosmopolitan Russian 'Revolutionary': the one was 'backward,' provincial, prejudiced; the other multi-lingual, inquisitive, worldly.[2] Trotsky's caricature of the Fabians was painted in Marxist hues: uninterested in 'the life of other nations' or a global proletariat, the 'blinkered' Fabian statisticians tinkered with domestic politics while the great 'historical process,' of which the Revolution of 1917 was an outward form, transformed class relations across Russia and Europe at large.

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[1] 'A Philistine on a Revolutionary,' [Review of Wells' 'The Dreamer in the Kremlin,' 1920-21], *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, April 1924, in Leon Trotsky, *Collected Writings and Speeches on Britain* 3vols. (London New Park Publications, 1974), Vol.1, iii, 192.

[2] In the 'Preface' to the 1888 English edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels defined the 'bourgeoisie' as 'the class of modern Capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour.' The 'proletariat,' by distinction, was 'the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production but their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live.' Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2002), 219.

The two kinds of socialist Trotsky described in his *Pravda* review—the navel-gazing Fabian and the horizon-eyed 'Revolutionary'—play into the stereotypes of Marxist accounts of nationalism and internationalism in the twentieth century. A key text for this tradition is *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), in which Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx famously proposed that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.'[3] This maxim became the 'fundamental theme,' Frederic Jameson claimed, for historical 'narratives' written from a Marxist standpoint.[4] The triumphant clarion call at the conclusion of the *Manifesto*—'WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!'— illustrates the progression from the 'theme' of 'class struggles' to the theory of 'socialist' or 'Marxist internationalism,' which anticipated the unification of 'working classes' from all nations against the capitalists and bourgeois classes of each.[5] As Josef Stalin wrote in *Fundamentals of Leninism* (1924), published in the same year as Trotsky's *Pravda* review, 'true internationalism' could only be based on the unification of 'the toiling masses' across all nations.[6] Culminating in, for instance, the International Working Men's Association, known as the First International, founded in London in 1864, this theory of 'socialist internationalism' is embedded in twentieth-century interpretations of European and global varieties of nationalism.

Twentieth-century British Marxist historians inherited the 'theme' and to an extent the conclusions of this tradition. The classics from this school—Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), and Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1990)—interpret twentieth-century history as a contest in which the interests of bourgeois nationalism, or liberal

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[3] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 219.
[4] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic act* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1981]), 19.
[5] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 258.
[6] Josef Stalin, *Fundamentals of Leninism* (New York: 1939): 122-24; quoted in Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism*, 97.

imperialism competed with, and ultimately suppressed, the aspirations of a global proletariat through the 'imagining' or 'invention' of national identifications. Twentieth-century conflict continued to rage between nation states, as 'imagined communities,' rather than between classes, dealing a death-blow to the 'fundamental theme' of Marxism: on the basis of this disjunction between Marxist theories of internationalism and reality of historical conditions, Tom Nairn influentially proclaimed in *The Break-Up of Britain* (1977) that 'the theory of nationalism represents Marxism's greatest historical failure.'[7] In testimony to the tight-knit discourse of British Marxist historiography, both Anderson and Jameson include this quotation in their own classics; and both describe *The Break-Up of Britain* as 'pathbreaking.'[8] While Anderson moderated Nairn's claim, suggesting instead that neo-nationalism was an 'anomaly' rather than a terminal contradiction for Marxism, he nonetheless retained the logic pitting Marxist internationalism on the opposite side of the equation to nationalism.[9]

The logic of Marxist internationalism has shaped these historians' interpretations of the place of 'Fabianism' in the history of socialism and nationalism. Trotsky's image of the parochial Fabian 'Philistine' *versus* the cosmopolitan 'Revolutionary' sets the tone for this tradition. The assumption underwriting this interpretation is that as non-Marxist and 'bourgeois' socialists, the Fabians were uninterested in the 'life of other nations,' and contributed to the suppression of 'working-class' interests by promoting British imperialism. Hobsbawm's influential reading of 'Fabianism' as an 'anomaly' on the British political left exemplifies this view:

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[7] Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: crisis and neo-nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977), 332.
[8] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]), 3; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 298.
[9] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3.

> The Fabians, alone among socialist groups, opposed the formation of an independent party of labour, supported imperialism, refused to oppose the Boer war, took no interest in the traditional international and anti-war preoccupations of the left, and their leaders took practically no part in the trade union revivals of 1889 or 1911.[10]

Like many historians interested in the question of the Fabian Society's attitude towards international politics and society, Hobsbawm cites Bernard Shaw's Fabian tract 'Fabianism and Empire' to corroborate his argument. Published by Grant Richards in 1900 after divisive debate within the Society, this tract is granted undue weight as a clear-cut statement of Fabian policy, and too frequently divorced from the broader debates about nationalism, internationalism, and imperialism out of which it arose.[11]

Even Alan McBriar, whom Hobsbawm described as 'the most elaborate Fabian historian,' concurred with the canonical view on the Fabians' nationalist preoccupations. Prior to 1900, McBriar claimed, 'the Fabians had simply not bothered about international affairs,' not 'even to consider their relation to England's domestic economy.' Taken 'by surprise' by the Transvaal War, the second of the Boer Wars, which broke out in 1899, the Fabians had had to improvise a 'stance' on British imperialism and foreign policy in response to external pressures.[12] We can see in this necessarily cursory overview how the 'fundamental theme' of the Marxist historical method and social history has led to the prevailing view that the early Fabians were at best uninterested in, and at worst hostile towards, the aspirations of 'socialist internationalism.'

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Since the 'cultural turn' of the 1980s and 1990s, historians have increasingly questioned the viability of the 'fundamental theme' of Marxist internationalism. As Bruce Robbins states simply in *Feeling Global* (1999), 'the term *internationalism* has a number of

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[10] Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, 253.
[11] Bernard Shaw, *Fabianism and Empire: a manifesto* (London: Grant Richards, 1900).
[12] McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics*, 'Chapter Five: The Fabians, Imperialism, Tariff Reform, and War,' 119-145 (119).

diverse and overlapping meanings.'[13] Shifting the focus from the rhetoric of 'class struggles' and economic bases for teleological, 'historical processes' onto questions about symbolic and cultural elements, or what Akira Iriye, following Frank Ninkovich in *Modernity and Power* (1994), calls 'structures of meaning'—'memory, ideology, emotions, lifestyles, scholarly and artistic works, and other symbols'—historians have proposed new ways of thinking about, and new 'themes' for interpreting, internationalism beyond the logic and explanations of Marxism and international relations.[14]

During the 1990s and 2000s, Akira Iriye in particular influentially applied the strategies of the 'cultural turn' to the task of 'internationalising' history. Working with a definition of 'cultural internationalism' as 'the fostering of international cooperation through cultural activities across national boundaries,' Iriye maps out the emergence of a 'world order' that was not 'completely identifiable' with 'geopolitical relations among states.' He argues, that is, that 'the exchange of ideas, cultures, and persons had served to develop an international community that was not interchangeable with the world order defined by military power and considerations of national interests.'[15] As Iriye points out in *Cultural Internationalism and the World Order* (1997), with Marxist historiography clearly in his sights, 'nations' were not the only 'communities' to be 'imagined': 'individuals and groups of people from different lands have sought to develop an alternative community of nations and peoples on the basis of their cultural interchanges.'[16] The cultural bases for these transnational 'communities' might include, for instance, bird watching and literature, music and palaeography. While this 'cultural

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[13] Robbins, *Feeling Global*, 16.
[14] Frank A. Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: a history of the domino theory in the twentieth century* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 8-10; see Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism*, 3.
[15] Iriye, *Global Community: the role of international organizations in the making of the contemporary world*, 191.
[16] Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism*, 2-3.

internationalism' has been at best ignored, at worst 'ridiculed' by 'practitioners of power politics' and historians alike, such 'efforts' have, he argued, 'altered the world community and immeasurably enriched our understanding of international affairs.'[17]

Influenced by Iriye's scholarship, Glenda Sluga recently revised 'the self-conscious reduction of internationalism to the nineteenth-century story of Marxism' embedded in the classic twentieth-century histories of nationalism.[18] In *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (2013), Sluga recasts the central question of this tradition—inherited from Ernst Renan's famous formula, *'qu-est ce que la nation*?'—as 'what is the international'? In answer, she too identifies 'a wide range of imagined communities' predicated on interests other than 'class struggles' or sovereign nation states. Borrowing from this tradition the emphasis on '"imagined" or "invented"' communities, Sluga looks 'through to the cultural underpinnings of visions of international community, the invisible moral order that internationalism implied, and its political implications' to describe a 'distinctly twentieth-century internationalism.' Two features distinguish this characteristically 'twentieth-century internationalism,' namely that it is liberal and not Marxist in motivation; and that it cannot be sequestered from the 'narratives of nationalism' that have hitherto dominated the discourse:

> As twinned liberal ideologies internationalism and nationalism inspired a wide range of communities, but at their core were the same unresolved questions about the nature of individuals and groups, and the extent to which human beings could fashion a destiny of their choice.[19]

These studies recognise the roles of Fabian socialists in the conception and advocacy of international organisations for the promotion of international peace and justice. Sluga points out that by the end of the First World War, the League of Nations Society in Britain, one of a 'raft of associations' supporting the international organisation, became

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[17] Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism*, 3.
[18] Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, 152.
[19] Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, 3.

the League of Nations Union comprising not only former Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, but also 'the Fabians, H. G. Wells, and Leonard Woolf, and a bushel of British politicians.'[20] Wells in particular enjoyed the 'status as the spokesperson of a progressive internationalism,' and has a claim to being the '"father" of the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.' Iriye, further, describes Leonard Woolf as 'one of the first writers to stress the theme of global interdependence and, in particular, to note the growing importance of international organisations.'[21] As Tony Benn, a member of Parliament and Chair of the Fabian International and Commonwealth Bureau, wrote to the *New Left Review* in 1964 dispelling this myth about parochial 'Fabianism,' the Society was, and long had been, dedicated to international affairs. Through the Fabian tract series, which had since the Society's earliest years been published for distribution abroad, the Fabians aimed, Benn explained, 'to provide a socialist forum for the exchange of ideas and a vehicle for arguments about priorities, throughout the developing world.'[22]

The Fabians' contribution to articulating and organising 'global interdependence' in the twentieth century was, it is worth noting, recognised during and immediately after the First World War. A 1918 *Saturday Review* article, 'Imperialism or Internationalism,' for instance, suggests the Fabians were in fact recognised as prominent 'internationalists,' and not the 'narrow' 'imperialists' as Marxist narratives would come to insist:

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[20] Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, 35.
[21] Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, 84; Iriye, *Global Community: the role of international organizations in the making of the contemporary world*, 37.
[22] Tony Benn, 'Fabianism and Colonialism,' *New Left Review* 1, no. 25 (1964), 84-86 (86).

> The leader of the Internationalists is Mr. Arthur Henderson, supported by a powerful group of 'intellectuals,' the Sidney Webbs, the Fabians, Mr. Lowes Dickinson and the Union of Democratic Control, an organisation whose influence with the rising generation from the Universities and public schools it would be foolish to ignore.[23]

Arthur Henderson, who joined the Fabian Society in 1912, was the first British socialist to enter Cabinet while an active member of a socialist society.[24] During the 1900s, he became a prominent advocate of international socialism, pressing for the Labour Party's participation in the Stockholm International Socialist Congress of 1917, advocating the formation of a league of nations, and re-forging, with Ramsay McDonald, the Second International (later the Socialist International) in the hope of furthering democratic socialism across Europe.

While we could rewrite the history of 'Fabianism' and internationalism on the basis of the contributions of Fabians such as Wells, Webb, Henderson, and Woolf to international organisations like the League of Nations, this chapter instead brings the advances of 'cultural internationalism'—understood in line with the above ideas from Iriye and Sluga, and not as a 'rough synonym,' with Bruce Robbins, for 'cosmopolitanism'—to our questioning of what is 'internationalism,' and how the Fabians imagined themselves as part of a broader cultural community beyond the political and cultural identities of England.[25] We have seen in earlier chapters how the Fabians channelled their own ideas through Sergei Stepniak's concept of the Russian *raznotchensky*, for instance, and how contemporaries like William Hodgson associated 'Fabianism' with 'Ibsenism' and the works and life philosophy of Tolstoy. This chapter brings further such cross-cultural resonances to the fore, arguing that the Fabians imagined and cultivated an international solidarity with European writers and intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century.

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[23] 'Imperialism or Internationalism?,' *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 125, no. 3273 (1918), 644-45 (644).
[24] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 155.
[25] Robbins, *Feeling Global*, 17.

Such an approach provides an opportunity for reconsidering the Marxist interpretation of the putative political and cultural parochialism and nationalism of early Fabian socialism. Removing the Marxist monopoly over 'socialist internationalism,' we can reconsider anew the Fabians' contributions to and explorations of international cooperation and exchange through cultural activities and networks. This revision involves questioning not only the supposed nationalism of early 'Fabianism,' but also, in keeping with the broader ideas of this thesis, the long-presumed 'Philistinism' in the cultural sense of the Fabian programme. We can counter, that is, Trotsky's caricature of the Fabians as 'deeply provincial,' existing in 'an exceedingly cloistered little world […] despite the fact that they live in London,' with evidence that the Fabians saw themselves as negotiating their own position in relation to international forces, albeit one distinct from Marxist logic.[26] As Edward Pease reflected in 1916, even in the 1880s, 'the Society was thoroughly aware of its relation to international socialism.'[27] This 'relation' was not organised around 'class struggles' across different nation states, however, but around a sense of international community based on ideas and cultural exchange.

This perspective simultaneously provides an opportunity to re-inject a socialist element into Sluga's interpretation of twentieth-century nationalism and internationalism as 'twinned liberal ideologies.' The 1880s through to the 1910s may be seen as a transitional period in which the burgeoning British socialist movement increasingly rivalled liberalism for the authority to challenge the *status quo*. While the 'new internationalism' of Sluga's study defined itself against 'nineteenth-century proletarian internationalism,' we can see in early twentieth-century definitions of the 'new internationalism' a blend of socialist and liberal ideas underpinning the

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[26] 'The Fabian "Theory" of Socialism,' in *Where is England Going*, Trotsky, *Collected Writings and Speeches on Britain* , 57-8.
[27] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 54.

conceptualisation of an international community based not on a transnational class struggle, but on political and intellectual freedoms. As one reviewer for the *Westminster Review* wrote in defence of 'international Socialism' in 1906:

> When nationalism fights, be it by constitutional means, be it by open revolt, and gains further liberties, then it assists internationalism; for liberty is the sustenance of internationalism, and as the craving for liberty is planted in every human breast, so internationalism cannot be suppressed, and will come.[28]

The 'new internationalism'—synonymous here with a 'new' socialist internationalism shed of Marxist rhetoric—proceeds from a universal love of 'liberty.' The mixed rhetoric of socialism and liberalism reflects the porous radical and reformist movement in London before the First World War. As in their evocation of a kind of statist liberalism in opposition to the statutory censorship of the theatre, and their advocacy of the State as the guarantor of the 'best' for teacher and students in the education debates, the Fabians once again can be seen negotiating a heady mix of liberal ideals and socialist doctrine, this time in imagining the grounds for an international community of political émigrés, a common solidarity with Russian revolutionaries and radicals living in London at the turn of the twentieth century.

'Fostering International Cooperation': Networks and Circles of 'Sympathy'

If Paris at the *fin de siècle* was the cultural heart of the 'world republic of letters,' London was arguably its political counterpart. Long a haven for political émigrés from across Europe and America, London sheltered many with its relative political and civil liberties.[29] The Russian revolutionary Peter Kropotkin, reflecting on his 'escape' from Russian prison through the Danish commune of Christiania, recalled how in 1886, when he boarded the steamer that was to deliver him to Hull, he 'greeted' the Union Jack

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[28] K. F. E, 'Imperialism, Nationalism, and Internationalism,' *Westminster Review* 165, no. 3 (March 1906), 240-48 (244, 242).
[29] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

under which she sailed 'from the depth of [his] heart,' knowing it was 'the flag under which many refugees, Russian, Italian, French, Hungarian, and of all nations, have found asylum.'[30] England's 'fame as the historic friends of freedom,' as one *New Age* reviewer put it in 1907, flourished among exiles like Kropotkin who were drawn by the promise of a free press, free speech, and free political affiliation.[31] Russian, Italian and Spanish revolutionaries in particular capitalised on English liberties, using London as a base from which to print and disseminate radical literature across Europe. Indeed, George Haupt has suggested that before 1910, the free press of London was vital for disseminating radical literature and furthering Continental socialist and radical thought.[32]

One outcome of this immigrant population was the emergence in London of a dynamic international community. In their description of a weekend garden party in radical Edwardian London, George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic evoked a cosmopolitan mix of radicals and revolutionaries of all nationalities and creeds. Through this scene we can begin to complicate the presumption that the Fabians were 'cloistered' from the international radical community in London, as Trotsky and others have claimed:

> Malatesta, Louis Michel, the Spaniard Tarrida del Marmol and revolutionaries of almost every European and American country mingle with Fabians like Shaw and Pease, trade unionists like Tom Mann, Guy Bowman and Ben Tillett, artists like Moscheles, craftsmen like Nevinson and Ford, and odd figures of the literary half-world like Frank Harris.[33]

A range of more and less institutionalised settings—private parties and gatherings like the one evoked here, as well as society meetings and lectures, public protests and

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[30] Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist, with a preface by George Brandes* 2vols. (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1899), Vol.2, 180.
[31] Holbrook Jackson and Alfred Orage, '"The Anglo-Russian Alliance',' *The New Age* I, no. 1 (4 July 1907), 145.
[32] Through translation in Carl Levy, 'Review: 'The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London',' *History Workshop*, no. 18 (1984), 186-92 (187).
[33] George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: a biographical study of Peter Kropotkin* (London: Boardman, 1950), 250.

'provincial' tours—provided opportunities for fostering a sense of collective identity within a highly diverse community during the 1880s through to the 1900s.

The Russian émigré population was a notable presence in this radical community. As Lloyd Gartner has shown, census results record an increase in the Russian population living in Wales and England from 2,513 in 1871 to 62,862 in 1911.[34] After a period of relative liberalism under Tsar Alexander II (1855-1881), political émigrés escaping persecution and censorship under the reactionary Tsars Alexander III (1881-1894) and Nicolas II (1894-1917) were drawn to England by the political freedom guaranteed by British Common Law. Kropotkin, an aristocrat by birth and mathematician and evolutionary scientist by training, was among the most prominent of these. A leader of the international anarchist movement in the 1870s, he lived an itinerant existence, lecturing and publishing across Europe as opportunity and the law afforded. In January 1886, however, upon his release after two years in a French prison, Kropotkin accepted an invitation from the Fabian Society's most prominent anarchist, Charlotte Wilson, to settle in London. Protected by the free press, Kropotkin embarked on a prolific period of English-language writing, publishing *Words of A Rebel* (1885), *Russian and French Prisons* (1887), *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1899), *Mutual Aid* (1902), and *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature* (1905) to name a few of the works through which he promoted ideas about international peace, evolutionary altruism, collectivist economics, and Russian intellectual and literary history.

It was into this thriving cosmopolitan and intellectual community that Sergei Mikhailovich Kravchinsky, later known as Stepniak, finally settled in July 1884. Stepniak's story is a rich and varied one, replete with political assassination, anarchy, and exile: like Kropotkin, he was welcomed into Fabian circles and is thus also

[34] Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914*, Studies in society (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), 283.

inextricably woven into the Fabian experience of 'international socialism' and London's international community at the turn of the twentieth century. A militant anarchist in the 1870s, Stepniak fled Russia after murdering General Mezentsev, the chief of the Tsar's secret police, on 4 August 1878. Six years of exile diffused Stepniak's fanaticism, such that when he arrived in London, he pursued 'literary' rather than 'military methods' to promote reform in Russia.[35] As he confessed to a fellow Russian-in-exile Nikolai Tchaikovsky upon his arrival in London, Stepniak had come to believe that the well-considered word, impartial and measured, 'is the best way—in fact the only way of making someone believe what you want him to.'[36] This 'literary' method spoke to the Fabians' own founding principles, and their belief in the power of ideas and persuasion over revolution or violence as a force for social reform.

Kropotkin remarked of his fellow compatriot-in-exile that after only two years of living in London, Stepniak had become 'a force exerting influence on English intellectual life.' With 'a wide circle of acquaintances among the leading figures of the radical-socialist movement' who all 'held him in deep respect and personal sympathy,' Stepniak thrived in the cosmopolitan community of London.[37] Colin Holmes put this feature another way when he remarked that upon his settlement in London in 1884 Stepniak began 'hobnobbing with members of the newly formed Fabian Society.'[38] Stepniak met Bernard Shaw within weeks of landing in England at a public demonstration protesting against the House of Lords' opposition to the Third Reform Bill.[39] Not long after, Edward Pease initiated a long friendship, writing to him personally just four months after co-

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[35] David Saunders, Kravchinsky, Sergey Mikhailovick (1851-1895), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Reprint Edition: Oxford University Press, September 2013), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/62226 doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/62226 Accessed 22 August 2014.
[36] Donald Senese, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii: the London years*, Russian Biography Series (Newtonville, Mass: Oriental Research Partners, 1987), 27.
[37] Cited in Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, 38.
[38] Colin Holmes, 'Immigrants, Refugees and Revolutionaries,' John Slatter, *From the other shore : Russian political emigrants in Britain, 1880-1917* (London: Cass, 1984) 7-22 (11).
[39] Saunders, 'Kravchinsky, Sergey Mikhailovick (1851-1895).'

founding the Fabian Society: on 13 June 1892, Pease successfully nominated Stepniak for membership of the Fabian Society, formalising the Russian exile's already extensive contacts within this social network.[40] Annie Besant reviewed Stepniak's writings in her literary journal *Our Corner*, and borrowed liberally from his ideas in her own writing on Russian history and culture.[41] Hubert Bland and Edith Nesbit, one of the Fabian Society's longest serving couples, were likewise 'frequent guests' at Stepniak's home, while Charlotte Wilson (among others) reputedly felt for Stepniak a more than strictly professional 'attraction.'[42]

Through this Fabian network, Stepniak, like Kropotkin, became a regular on the London radical-socialist lecture scene, delivering talks and writing for the Fabian Society as well as other radical organisations on a broad variety of topics, including, as the Society minutes from the 1890s record, Russian politics, and European and British foreign policy.[43] Such details, taken not from published Fabian doctrine but from the archives of the meetings themselves, cast doubt on the long-held supposition that the Fabians had 'simply not bothered with international affairs' before 1900. Stepniak's contribution was not only on foreign policy and European politics, however: he also shared with these Fabian circles his deep knowledge and love of Russian literature and history. In the same Fabian lecture series of 1890, after Shaw had delivered what would become *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, for instance, Stepniak lectured on 'Tolstoi, Tchernytchevsky, and the Russian school.'[44] He published widely on Russian politics, culture, and history, both in the socialist press, for papers such as *Time* and *To-Day*, and in the mainstream press, particularly *Nineteenth Century*, the *New Review*, and the

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[40] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book. C4. 13 June 1892, 69.
[41] See, for instance, Annie Besant, 'Russia under the Tzars,' *Our Corner* (October 1885), 218-24; Annie Besant, '"The Russian Storm-Cloud.",' *Our Corner* 8(July 1886), 47-48.
[42] Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, 27.
[43] Society, Executive Committee Minute Book. C6 8 November 1895, 60.
[44] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 94.

Fortnightly Review, edited by that figure of the 'literary half-world' who attended Kropotkin's *soirées*, Frank Harris.

This confluence of political interests and social circles encouraged Stepniak to formalise the 'deep respect and personal sympathy' he found amongst his newfound London friends in the form of the Society for the Friends of Russian Freedom (SFRF). Incorporated on 24 January 1890, the SFRF aimed through the dissemination of information to solicit support from the 'many people in England who sympathised with the efforts which were being made in Russian to obtain those rights which they had believed…were the inalienable rights of English people.'[45] The Society attracted, that is, English citizens who supported equivalent rights in Russia for Russian citizens. The liberal phrasing of the Society's self-understanding may largely be attributed to its inaugural president Robert Spence Watson (1890-1911), who was also president, from 1890 to 1902, of the National Liberal Federation. An educationalist, literary scholar, and campaigner for international peace, Watson brought his liberalism to bear on his efforts to help the development of free institutions in Russia through the spread of 'sympathy' for the Russian people through literary means.[46] To an audience member who questioned 'what is the use of expressing sympathy' at a 1901 gathering hosted by Arthur Sidgwick in Oxford, Watson rejoined, 'there was no greater force in the world.'[47] It was a sentiment that resonated in Joseph Conrad's belief, expressed in 'Autocracy and War' (1905), that only the 'sympathetic imagination' could teach the British public to see

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[45] Robert Spence Watson, 'The Friends of Russian Freedom,' *Westminster review, Jan. 1852-Jan. 1914* 133, no. 1 (January 1890), 470-78 (477).
[46] Percy Corder, Watson, Robert Spence (1837-1911), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Reprint Edition: Oxford University Press, January 2008), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/62226 doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/36777 Accessed 11 August 2014.
[47] 'Society of Friends of Russian Freedom - a Gathering in Oxford,' *The Times*, no. 36166 (1900), 13.

and feel, and bring about a 'Europeanism' to stave off the antiquated powers of the Russian autocracy.[48]

The foundation and operation of the SFRF gives reason to question Trotsky's juxtaposition of the Fabian 'Philistine' and the Russian 'Revolutionary.' As Jock MacLeod observes in *Literature, Journalism and the Vocabularies of Liberalism* (2013), even within London's notably porous radical community at the turn of the twentieth century, the 'crossovers' between the Fabian Society and the newly formed Society of Friends of Russian Freedom were particularly striking.[49] Despite the present-day view, popularised by Barry Hollingsworth, that the SFRF was predominantly an English Liberal outfit, the Fabians were widely recognised as key supporters of Stepniak's chosen cause.[50] A *New Age* 'portrait' of the 'Fabian secretary' observed that Edward Pease had been involved in the formation of 'a society favourable to the movement for Russian freedom.'[51] As the Society's treasurer, Pease defended Russian political freedom openly through personal service and written polemic. He edited *Free Russia*, the foremost organ in England of opposition to tsarist Russia, and encouraged his wife and other Fabians to contribute financially and personally to the running of the SFRF. Other early Fabian members who joined the SFRF include the translator Constance Garnett, printer George Standring (who served Executive terms from 1893 to 1908, and from 1909 to 1911), L. T. Mallet (1890-1892), and Joseph Frederick Green (1899-1900), who similarly edited *Free Russia*, and was the honorary secretary of the SFRF in the 1890s and early 1900s.

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[48] Joseph Conrad, 'Autocracy and War,' *Fortnightly Review* 78, no. 463 (1905), 1-21 (1-2).
[49] Jock Macleod, *Literature, Journalism, and the Vocabularies of Liberalism: politics and letters, 1886-1916*, Palgrave studies in nineteenth-century writing and culture (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 43.
[50] Barry Hollingsworth, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890-1917,' *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 3(1970), 45-64.
[51] S. Shallard, 'Our Portrait Gallery: I. The Fabian Secretary,' *The New Age*, no. 1 (9 May 1907), 30 17-32 (17).

These institutional 'crossovers' were not limited to a confluence of members, but may further be seen at work in the societies' comparable organisation and commitment to spreading the 'idea' to encourage social and political reform. As Watson explained in recognisably Fabian terms to readers of the *Westminster Review* in 1890, the SFRF did not seek to 'take any direct part in the struggle of the Russian people for political freedom,' but aimed instead at the drafting and distribution of literature to raise awareness among the English reading public of the atrocities of the Russian autocracy.[52] Members believed that these literary expressions of solidarity would 'convince those of their brethren in Russia who are bravely fighting for their rights that they are not alone in the struggle, that they have the strong moral support, the earnest sympathy, of all who love liberty and abhor tyranny.' If 'moral support' and 'earnest sympathy' seemed a 'small thing' to the reader who might believe only in 'action,' Watson insisted that 'the power and influence of sympathy are boundless':

> Not only does sympathy strengthen those who have already declared themselves, and stimulate them to continue the strife with renewed earnestness and vigour, but it encourages those, who have as yet taken no part, to come bravely forward.

It is significant that this internationalist 'society,' which included Fabians, anarchists, and freethinkers, was motivated by the 'sympathy' shared by 'all who love liberty and abhor tyranny.' The values of freedom of press, speech, and political affiliation motivated this otherwise politically diverse group, which 'imagined' solidarity with the Russian people both in the sense that the majority of the English members never met the Russian 'brethren' to whom they offered their support, and in the sense that this solidarity was expressed through cultural means. They took seriously the 'power' of lectures, protests, articles in the press, literature, and pamphlets as a counter-force to political oppression in Russia.

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[52] Watson, 'The Friends of Russian Freedom,' 474.

The 'vocabularies of liberalism,' to borrow McLeod's phrase, through which the SFRF, the Fabian Society, and other labour bodies expressed their solidarity with 'Russian freedom' bear testimony to the porous borders between ostensibly distinct political identities at the turn of the twentieth century. In July 1907, when Sir Edward Grey confirmed that the Liberal Government under Henry Campbell-Bannerman intended to sign an Anglo-Russian agreement, the fierce public debate that broke out about the legality, ethics, and purpose of a British treaty with an autocratic State reflected this socialist-liberal 'twinning.' At a public demonstration on 14 July jointly organised by the SFRF, the SDF, and the Fabian Society, the publisher Thomas Fisher Unwin (who was married to the Liberal Jane Cobden) moved, to a chorus of 'socialist songs,' that 'this meeting denounces the barbarities connived at by the Russian Government in the massacres of Jews, the devastation of the Caucasus and Baltic provinces, and the prison tortures in Riga, and sends its heartiest good wishes to those Russians who are so nobly struggling to establish freedom and liberty in their country.'[53] Sluga's vision of the 'cultural underpinnings' and 'moral order' sustaining the 'twinned liberal ideologies' of nationalism and internationalism can be profitably clarified by paying attention to such details: protesters from across the British left evoked the liberal values of 'sympathy,' 'humanity,' and 'freedom' in their polemic against 'power politics,' and arguments for international 'solidarity.' The Fabians were foremost in this effort, expressing their interests in 'international affairs' through a liberal vocabulary.

Edith Nesbit is, perhaps, an unlikely figure to evoke in the present argument that a liberal-socialist solidarity motivated the Fabians' sympathy for the movement for Russian political freedom. While literary historians have remarked on the Stepniak-like figure in the *Railway Children* (1906), and indeed the resonances of the circumstances

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[53] 'Friends Of Russian Freedom,' *The Times*, no. 38385 (1907), 12.

surrounding Alfred Dreyfus's incarceration in the 'absent father' scenario, Nesbit's contemporaries recognised her interest in Russian affairs as a core aspect of her socialist convictions.[54] In their editorialising of the treaty debate from a 'socialist' perspective in the *New Age*—which carried numerous articles and opinion pieces on the issue—Holbrook Jackson and Alfred Orage commended to 'readers who may be doubtful about the necessity of immediate action' 'a vigorous protest from the pen of E. Nesbit' printed on 4 July 1907. In her 'unanswerable plea,' printed under the title 'The Anglo-Russian Alliance,' Nesbit described the 'alarm and uneasiness in decent men of every shade of political opinion' caused by the British Government's 'diplomatic imbecility' in suggesting an alliance with a 'despotic' State. 'It is for us to speak out,' Nesbit implored her readers, appealing to a liberal sense of public duty, 'to let our voices be heard in indignation and protest. It is for each of us to say, and to see to it that the world hears us, that England shall not be allied with the Government of Russia.' In keeping with the Fabian motto of 'light, not heat,' the 'immediate action' she advocated was entirely constitutional and literary: 'write your letters,' she implored, 'to the member who represents you in Parliament,' and 'to the journal in whose pages you have read so often the tale of blood and cruelty.' Nesbit's desire for an international audience—let the 'world' hear our protest—indicates she too believed in the 'power' of 'sympathy' to transcend national identities, and cultivate a transnational community based on love of freedom and intolerance of tyranny.

There is evidence that contemporaries embedded their awareness of the socialist-liberal 'twinning' described above in their own definitions of 'the new internationalism,' a concept that was in fact in circulation before the First World War. As

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[54] Chamutal Noimann, ''Poke Your Finger into the Soft Round Dough': The Absent Father and Political Reform in Edith Nesbit's The Railway Children,' *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2005), 368-85; Smith Barbara, 'The Expression of Social Values in the Writing of E. Nesbit,' *Children's Literature* 3, no. 1 (1974), 153-64.

one *Westminster* reviewer observed in 1906, 'we have found that those who speak of internationalism versus nationalism are wrong.' The two concepts were, he argued in a move that anticipates Sluga's thesis, inextricably linked. To anyone who would ask 'how can England benefit by the liberties which, for instance, the Russians are gaining for themselves,' this reviewer—who outlined a vision for 'international Socialism'—replied, 'a nation cannot gain without its neighbours gaining.'[55] 'International Socialism' was motivated, that is, by the liberal ideal of mutual cooperation and elevation, and not by the Marxist theme of 'class struggles'. A subsequent *Review of Reviews* commentator explained further in a 1909 article that 'the new internationalism' aimed to 'provide' for universal, liberal values through specific international organisations:

> We must realise our interdependence in practical affairs. It is through the creation of international organisations for all the interests of human life that a positive content of the feeling of a common humanity is being provided.[56]

If this early, liberal definition of the 'new internationalism' is remarkable for its consonance with recent developments in the 'cultural turn' of international history, it is nonetheless not exceptional in the context of turn-of-the-century discourse. In these articles, as in the foundation and mission of the SFRF, we can see a double twinning at operation, not only in the articulation of the relationship between 'nationalism and internationalism,' but also in the progression towards the realisation of a socialist vision of an international community from overtly liberal ideals of 'common humanity' and a 'love' of 'liberty.'

Imagining a 'World Republic of Letters'

The aspirations towards a liberal-socialist internationalism based on the ideals of 'common humanity,' 'earnest sympathy,' and 'moral support' found direct expression in

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[55] E, 'Imperialism, Nationalism, and Internationalism,' 240- 248 (242).
[56] 'The New Internationalism,' *The Review of Reviews* 40, no. 236 (August 1909), 160.

the literary scene in London at the turn of the twentieth century. Once again, Pierre Bourdieu's critique of the 'external mode of analysis' that characterises the Marxist method is useful, as it offers a corrective to the logic—parochial Fabian 'Philistines' *versus* cosmopolitan Russian 'Revolutionaries'—that this theory has propagated. Bourdieu warned that Marxist critiques tend to approach the cultural artefact or work of art as a '*reflection*' of class interests or 'social characteristics' of authors or implied audiences, without due consideration of the 'struggles,' allegiances, and 'position-takings' that characterise the 'field of cultural production.'[57] To counteract analyses of literary and cultural artefacts as conduits of economic structures or intentional class interests, Bourdieu described the logic of the 'field.'

We can see this 'peculiar' logic of the 'Republic of Letters' at operation, for instance, in a letter that thirty-four 'British men of letters' published in the *Times* in December 1914, expressing their solidarity with 'our colleagues in Russia.'[58] In both their language and sentiment, the signatories of this letter indicated their indebtedness to the recent history of English 'strong moral support' and 'earnest sympathy' with the Russian experience, which had developed during the 1880s and 1890s. Bodies like the SFRF, and the Anglo-Russian Literary Society, founded in 1893 by English industrialist Edward Cazalet with the view to 'promote the study of Russian language and literature' had contributed to this development.[59] For two generations, English writers had found 'inspiration,' the signatories claimed, in Russian literature. Many could recall how on first reading a Russian novel they discerned—beneath the foreign sounding names, difficult to pronounce and impossible to remember—the stirring of 'a deep sense of having discovered a new home, of meeting an unknown kindred, of finding expressed

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[57] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 180-81.
[58] "British-Men-of-Letters", 'Russia In Literature,' *The Times*, no. 10 (1914), 10.
[59] Francis P. Marchant, 'Edward Alexander Cazalet,' *The Slavonic Review* 2, no. 6 (1924), 601-03 (601).

great burdens of thought which had lain unspoken and half-realized at the depths of our own minds.'[60] This expression of sympathy, entirely 'imagined,' is nearer in sentiment to Kropotkin's heartfelt relief upon reaching English soil, than it is to Marxist class identifications. The signatories internationalised, that is, the domain of the 'Republic of Letters,' expressing transnational solidarity based on intellectual sympathy between writers from Russia and England. They evoked conditions, such as the uncanny recognition of one's own ideas and identity in a stranger, that transcend linguistic and national barriers to imagine a community, or even kinship, between writers (and writers as readers) who in many instances (though there were, as discussed below, exceptions) never physically met or collaborated.

Many of the signatories of this 'tribute' would have been familiar to the loyal *Times* reader from the protests against statutory censorship of the theatre. The kinship they imagined with their 'Russian colleagues' was not exclusively vocational, but had to do with a belief in writers' rights and freedoms in the face of government interference. Familiar signatories from the earlier protest included William Archer, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Edward Garnett, Henry James, Thomas Hardy, and H. G. Wells; new names relevant to the present discussion include prominent translators and Fabian socialists Constance Garnett and Aylmer Maude. This sense of community evidently had to do not only with the vocation of the writer—which might extend to any literary community in any country—but more specifically to the writer's relation to, or struggle with, the State when it breached civil liberties, such as freedom of press and speech.

We can profitably reconsider the question of 'Fabianism' and internationalism by bringing an awareness of the 'Republic of Letters' and the liberal 'alliances' and communities operating in London at this time to the debate. In so doing, we can

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[60] "British-Men-of-Letters", 'Russia In Literature,' 10.

problematise for instance Ruth Livesey's recent suggestions that Sydney Olivier was 'increasingly marginalised' from the Fabian Society because of his investment in the 'internationalist dimension of socialist democracy,' and that Constance Garnett's 'immersion in contemporary Russian literature,' and her 'pacifist and internationalist slant' made her an exception among her Fabian peers.[61] Such claims are, on the balance of evidence considered here, simply not true.

Rebecca Beasley has recently argued that the 'English reception of Russian literature must be discussed' in terms of 'the models of identification Russian literature offered early twentieth-century English intellectuals' at a critical moment in the history of this community in Britain.[62] As will be shown below, the story of the Russian '*intelligentsia*' in the nineteenth century, or more particularly the historicised interpretation of this group that Stepniak and Kropotkin popularised through their English-language criticism, certainly did appeal, like Stepniak's *raznotchensky*, to the kind of identity the Fabian socialists were attempting to negotiate for themselves. The narrative of a progressive, educated 'class' that was loosely organised around cultural and intellectual capital and their opposition to an oppressive autocracy, but that was nonetheless not a political party, reflected the Fabians' own efforts to established a role as cultural and political commentators outside the field of practical politics.

It was Dmitry Svyatopolk Mirsky, a Russian scholar born in 1890 to an aristocratic family, who was among the first to offer an historicised account of the emergence of the British 'intelligentsia' as a product of the influence of Russian literature and émigrés living in London from the 1880s onwards. 'The war,' he argued in *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain* (1935), 'made Russian literature a living factor in the

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[61] Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism*, 197, 199.
[62] Rebecca Beasley, 'Russia and the Invention of the Modernist Intelligentsia,' in *Geographies of Modernism: literatures, cultures, spaces*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (London: Routledge, 2005), 21.

development of the mind of Britain, it wakened the intellectual class to consciousness and provided it with a name.'[63] If Mirsky diminished his argument through hyperbole, he nonetheless described a significant lexicographical and social factor in the emergence, or recognition, of British 'intellectuals' towards the end of the nineteenth century. Stefan Collini argues in *Absent Minds* (2006) that 'the semantic field around "intellectuals" in English has been much affected by associations derived from the Russian intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century.'[64] The striking contribution of the Fabians to this 'field,' as translators, popularisers, and critics of Russian literature and history, has been largely overlooked, an oversight that has compounded the old stereotype of the 'imperialist,' 'Philistine' Fabian.

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'The Fabian,' we have seen, was likened in the 1890s to a 'literary society' whose highly educated members were recognised leaders in the cultural field. From the early 1880s, certainly well before the First World War, the Fabians granted the Russian émigrés within their radical circles access to a vast literary and professional network, providing opportunities for 'intellectuals' like Stepniak and Kropotkin to reach an English audience through lectures, periodical literature, and published polemic. The support Fabian circles provided for Russian émigrés opened up possibilities for Russian literature, history, and politics, that is, within England. Legitimised by their association, Kropotkin and Stepniak—initially heralded by the British press as 'terrorists'—were able to disseminate their interpretation of Russian intellectual history amongst the review-reading public. In one example of how this alliance worked, Annie Besant, as editor of *Our Corner*, reviewed and endorsed Stepniak's political polemic, published writings by

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[63] D. S. Mirsky, *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain*, trans. Alec Brown (London: V. Gollancz, ltd., 1935), 112-13.
[64] Collini, *Absent Minds*, 60.

Russians including Nikolai Tchaikovsky, and reported widely on Russian political agitations in the late 1880s and early 1890s.[65] Bernard Shaw's claim to be a champion of Russian literature has been widely analysed, most recently in *The Only Hope of the World* (2012).[66] This monograph considers Shaw's enthusiasm for Russian literature and politics, investigating his friendships with the Russian anarchists in London in the 1880s, his attitude towards specific Russian writers, particularly Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky, his personal visits to Russia, and his later plays as expressions of this Russian influence.

This literary network also involved, however, more direct contact and deliberate collaboration between Fabians and the Russian 'intellectuals' living in London who aimed to earn sympathy and promote cultural exchange between English and Russian audiences, readers and writers alike. When Pease remarked on the Fabians' awareness of their 'relation to international socialism,' he referred for example to the fourth Fabian tract, 'What Socialism Is,' published in 1886. An eclectic amalgam of 'anarchist,' 'collectivist,' and 'socialist' thought, this tract juxtaposed August Bebel's *Woman in the Past, Present, and Future* (1885, English edition) with Charlotte Wilson's entry on 'anarchism,' written on 'behalf of the London Anarchists.' One of the Society's first female Executive officers and a prodigious intellectual, Wilson had invited Kropotkin to London in 1886 on behalf of the 'London Anarchists.' Upon his arrival, Kropotkin and Wilson began collaboration on the anarchist paper *Freedom,* founded in 1886, Kropotkin bringing his extensive publishing experience with socialist papers, and Wilson her intellectual energy and English anarchist networks. Wilson features prominently in

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[65] Annie Besant, 'The Russian Nihilist,' *Our Corner* (1886), 306 218-24; Annie Besant, '"The Russian Storm-Cloud.",' *Our Corner* 8(1886), 47-48; Besant, 'Russia under the Tzars,' Nikolai Tchaykovsky, 'Life and Property in Russia,' *Our Corner* 7(1886), 29-32.
[66] Olga Yu Soboleva and Angus James Wrenn, *The Only Hope of the World: George Bernard Shaw and Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

Hermia Oliver's study of the 'international' anarchist movement in late Victorian London.[67] Wilson's Fabian circles facilitated this contribution to the movement, providing her with a platform, publishing opportunities, and an audience for her polemic.

Wilson was not unique in this personal investment in the English reception of Russian politics and culture. In their various roles as professionals in the literary field, many key Fabians were instrumental, as Beasley implies if she does not explicitly state, in the importation of the Russian model of the '*intelligentsia*,' and, importantly, in the opening up of a space for the imagining of an English equivalent. Refining Mirsky's claim for the Russian '*intelligentsia*,' Beasley claims that 'the story of Russian literature' at the turn of the twentieth century 'was a compelling one for a new type of English intellectual, in transit from the generalized liberal values of the previous century towards the increasing pertinence of socialism.'[68] While Fabian socialists, including Constance and Edward Garnett, Aylmer and Louise Maude, Bernard Shaw, and Arthur Clutton-Brock, feature throughout Beasley's analysis as translators, critics, and popularisers of Russian literature, their corporate identity as Fabians, the literary network the Society provided, and the Fabians' role in articulating and imagining this liberal-socialist transition period in the 'invention' of an English 'intelligentsia,' remain underanalysed. It was not so much that in 'early twentieth-century intellectual culture,' as Beasley argues, 'the disinterested cultural values of the liberal intellectual *strained against* a politics increasingly informed by socialism' (italics added), but rather that

[67] Hermia Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 28, 37.
[68] Beasley, 'Russia and the Invention of the Modernist Intelligentsia,' 21.

these liberal 'values' increasingly came to be subsumed by socialism in the form of 'Fabianism.'[69]

When Constance Garnett undertook her ambitious translation of Turgenev's novels for Heinemann in 1894—the year she was elected to the Fabian Executive—she insisted, against her editor's recommendations, that the prefaces be written by Sergei Stepniak, who had joined the Society two years earlier.[70] While his untimely death on 25 December 1895 foreshortened this literary partnership, the two volumes for which Stepniak wrote a preface provide a fascinating account, written in English by a Russian 'intellectual,' of the emergence of the Russian '*intelligentsia*' and the conviction that literature was imbued with a 'history-making' power. Stepniak used the prefaces for Garnett's translations of *Rudin* and *A House of Gentlefolk*, both published by Heinemann in 1894, to historicise the emergence of this Russian intellectual class in the nineteenth century. Turgenev's novels, he wrote, 'are a sort of artistic epitome of the intellectual history of modern Russia, and also a powerful instrument of her intellectual progress.'[71] He instructed the English reader to approach Garnett's translations with this duality—the novel both as an 'epitome' or record of the emergence of a particular class, and as an 'instrument' for 'progress'—in mind:

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[69] Beasley, 'Russia and the Invention of the Modernist Intelligentsia,' 23.
[70] Patrick Waddington, Garnett [nee Black], Constance Clara, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Reprint Edition: Oxford University Press, May 2007), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/62226 doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/33332 Accessed 27 August 2014.
[71] S. Stepniak, 'Introduction,' Ivan Turgenev, *Rudin: a novel*, trans. Constance Garnett, XV vols., vol. I, The Novels of Ivan Turgenev (London: William Heinemann, 1894), xviii.

> In Turgenev's novels we see only educated Russia, or rather the more advanced thinking part of it, which he knew best, because he was a part of it himself. […] Although small numerically, the section of Russian society which Turgenev represents is enormously interesting, because it is the brain of the nation, the living ferment which alone can leaven the huge unformed masses. It is upon them that depend the destinies of their country.[72]

David Saunders's claim that Stepniak's most enduring 'legacy' in Britain is literary, rather than political, because it was in his Russian 'circle' in England that Garnett had first 'learned Russian,' reduces to a uni-directional flow what was in fact a mutual exchange of ideas between Fabians and Russian intellectuals living in London.[73]

The dissemination of the idea of the Russian '*intelligentsia*' as a 'Western,' progressive class, and the consequences that this framing had for the unique impact of Russian literature, illustrates this point. When Edward Garnett assumed the task of writing prefaces for Constance's Turgenev translations after Stepniak's death, he returned to the idea of the '*intelligentsia*' as the 'brain of the nation' to guide his own interpretation, and his identification of a liberal elite responsible for shaping society. In his preface to *Virgin Soil*, for instance, Garnett clarified the idea of a liberal, 'intellectual' class in terms that invite comparison with Bourdieu's 'Republic of Letters' and Stepniak's earlier prefaces:

> Though there are many liberal-minded men among the officials, still, in Solomon's words, 'the official is always an insider,' and therefore it is that the unofficial thinking part of Russia, the writers, the professors, the students, the press, and the more intelligent of the professional world, form an unorganised but permanent opposition.[74]

The 'alliance' Garnett described is not positive, in the sense of motivated by an active or deliberate subscription to a doctrine or group identity, but negative, in that these 'liberal-minded men' shared an antagonistic position that set them at odds with 'official' Russia. In their shared opposition to the 'official' side of organised politics, their highly literate strategies and literary membership, and their loosely corporate identity based

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[72] S. Stepniak, 'Introduction,' Turgenev, *Rudin: a novel*, xi.
[73] Saunders, 'Kravchinsky, Sergey Mikhailovick (1851-1895).'
[74] Edward Garnett, 'Introduction' in Ivan Turgenev, *Virgin Soil : a novel*, trans. Constance Garnett, 2 vols., vol. VI, The Novels of Ivan Turgenev (London: Heinemann, 1896), xiv.

on 'progressive' liberalism, the Fabian socialists and 'thinking part of Russia' held similar positions in the 'peculiar universe' between politics and literature.

Kropotkin promoted a similar interpretation of the unique function of Russian literature as an 'instrument' for change, and the emergence of a powerful 'intellectual' class in his own English-language literary history. In *Russian Literature*, a survey published by Duckworth in 1905, he proposed the distinction within the Russian 'intellectual' class between two 'circles,' the 'Westerners' and the 'Slavophiles.' Turgenev and Alexander Herzen—joint editors of the liberal-democratic *The Bell*—exemplified 'the more intelligent and the better educated representatives' of the 'Westerners,' a 'circle' of Russian intellectuals 'who attended to Western liberalism of the Whig, of the Guizot type,' and for whom developments in the West—the 'depopulation of the villages, the horrors of freshly developing capitalism (revealed in England by the Parliamentary Commissions of the forties), the powers of bureaucracy which had developed in France, and so on'—were by law of historical evolution inevitable for Russia.[75]

Kropotkin returned time and again to the central thesis that the 'Western liberalism' of the 'intellectuals' was responsible for the striking poignancy and social impact of Russian literature in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a 'consequence' of autocratic prohibitions against freedom of press and speech, he argued, the 'best minds of the country,' particularly the 'Westerners,' 'have chosen the poem, the novel, the satire, or literary criticism as the medium from expressing their aspirations, their conceptions of national life, or their ideals.'[76] In a preface written from his cottage in Kent—where he was a neighbour of the Fabians Henry Salt, who had found him his residence, Sydney Olivier, Edward Pease, and the newly-wed Garnetts—Kropotkin

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[75] 'The "Circles"—Westerners and Slavophiles,' Petr Kropotkin, *Ideals and Realities in Russian literature* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1905 [Russian Literature (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1905)]), 267.
[76] Kropotkin, *Russian Literature*, vi.

explained the effect of these historical pressures upon the function of the novel in Russia:

> Nowhere else does it exercise so profound and so direct an influence upon the intellectual development of the younger generation. There are novels of Turguéneff, and even of the less-known writers, which have been real stepping stones in the development of Russian youth within these last fifty years.[77]

Turgenev, he argued, belonged to the 'history-making portions of Russian society.' Here he described the same liberal phenomenon Stepniak had observed in the 1890s: writers and their novels exerted a 'direct…influence' upon the social and intellectual development of the nation.[78] Such claims resonate in, for instance, the SFRF aspirations towards 'sympathy' as the greatest 'force in the world,' and in the quintessentially Fabian conviction in the 'power of the "idea"' itself.

Through reviews, biographical sketches, and opinion pieces in the periodical press, Edward Garnett lent his literary authority to Kropotkin's criticism, facilitating the revolutionary's acceptance into London's literary circles, and the reception of his ideas.[79] Describing Kropotkin in one article as 'an "intellectual" who has backed the cause of the downtrodden and suffering men against Authority,' Garnett promoted the Russian anarchist's humanist and liberal arguments for international cooperation and exchange.[80] In his general periodical criticism, however, Garnett was particularly interested less in Kropotkin's literary criticism—which he found skewed by the 'natural bias' of the 'reformer' who reads 'too strenuous a moral aim' in the writer's 'picture of life'—than in what Garnett called Kropotkin's 'sociological' and 'historical' method of interpreting the conditions that gave rise to the Russian '*intelligentsia*.'[81] Reviewing

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[77] Kropotkin, *Russian Literature*, v.
[78] Kropotkin, *Russian Literature*, vi.
[79] Edward Garnett, 'Russian Literature,' *The Speaker* (1906), 410-12; Edward Garnett, 'Kropotkin-Revolutionist,' *The Outlook* 4, no. 99 (December 1899), 674-75; Edward Garnett, 'Tolstoy and Turgenieff,' *The Anglo-Saxon Review* 6(1900), 150-65.
[80] Garnett, 'Kropotkin- Revolutionist,' 675.
[81] Garnett, 'Russian Literature,' 411.

Russian Literature, Garnett paraphrased the logic of Kropotkin's thesis. 'Under the harsh despotism of Nicolas I.,' he wrote:

> the intellect of Russia may be said to have been generally suspect, and the persistent attempt at the suppression of liberal ideas has led it, point by point, from a vague intellectual ferment in the breast of society to a growing desire to analyse the conditions mental, moral, and physical, of the national life at large.[82]

Once again, the idea that the suppression of 'liberal' thought in the mid-nineteenth century forged the notably progressive orientation and reformist ambitions of the 'intellectuals' in Russia gained traction in Garnett's criticism, and underpins the solidarity that he imagines with 'intellectuals' living and working in Russia.

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The narrative of Fabian 'Philistines' and Russian 'Revolutionaries' posited in the Marxist histories is on review inadequate to the task of describing this complex cultural and literary interchange, and the free-flow of ideas, historical interpretations and aspirations between Fabians involved in the literary field and in translating Russian literature and history, and the Russian 'intellectuals' who found political asylum in London. The Fabians reviewed in this chapter believed in the power of the 'sympathetic imagination,' and collaborated with their Russian 'colleagues' on literary projects, societies dedicated to evoking 'sympathy,' and through the broader liberal vision of literature—the written and spoken word—as a 'force' contributing to spreading political freedom.

The example of Aylmer and Louise Maude, Fabians and translators, provides further opportunity for reassessing the long-held 'Philistinism' and parochialism of the Fabians. The Maudes were, alongside the Garnetts, foremost translators and critics of Russian literature at the turn of the twentieth century. They married in Moscow in August 1884, where Aylmer was working as an English-language tutor and subsequently as a director of a carpet company, and where Louise was living with her father, a

[82] Garnett, 'Russian Literature,' 411.

Russian-based English businessman. Maude was personally acquainted with Tolstoy, whom he visited regularly while in Russia: in his 'Recollections of Tolstoy,' Maude recalled that during the winters of 1895 to 1897, he visited the Russian writer at his home 'almost every week.'[83] Even after the Maudes settled in England, Maude continued his visits—in August 1902, October 1906, and in autumn 1909—as well as maintaining correspondence until Tolstoy died in 1910.[84]

The couple joined the Fabian Society after they resettled in England in 1901. Maude sat on the Executive from 1907 to 1912, where he found full support—notably from Bernard Shaw, Rebecca West, H. G. Wells, Edward Garnett, and Arnold Bennett—for a public campaign for a collected works of Tolstoy in English.[85] Maude had already established himself as a pre-eminent translator of Russian literature before he joined the Society, performing a service for the reception of Tolstoy's works in England comparable to Constance Garnett's contribution to Turgenev's *oeuvre*. That Tolstoy was known in turn-of-the-century England as a political and religious as much as a literary figure was at least in part owing to the Maudes' translations of his entire works, not just his fiction.[86] Between them, the Maudes translated the bulk of Tolstoy novels, essays, plays, religious treatises, and even letters, for an English readership, as well as writing a biography and an exegesis of the Russian novelist's teachings and views on family.

In the early 1900s, Tolstoy was renowned in England not only as a novelist, but also as a prominent spokesperson for what one *Review of Reviews* commentator described as 'universal mankind.'[87] In particular, he was accredited with exciting

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[83] William Baker, Maude, Aylmer (1858-1938), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Reprint Edition: Oxford University Press, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/62226 doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/62226 Accessed 10 October 2013.
[84] Baker, 'Maude, Aylmer (1858-1938).' Accessed 10 October 2013.
[85] Baker, 'Maude, Aylmer (1858-1938).' Accessed 10 October 2013.
[86] Beasley, 'Russia and the Invention of the Modernist Intelligentsia,' 20.
[87] 'The Progress of the World,' *The Review of Reviews* 41, no. 244 (1910), 297-315 (309).

'unusual interest' among the English public in the plight of the Russian Doukhobors, a Christian pacifist minority persecuted under Alexander III for resisting conscription.[88] Maude extended his admiration and personal sympathy for Tolstoy into accepting this cause as his own, travelling in September 1898 with a delegation to an international conference in Canada, convened to discuss asylum for this peasant minority.[89] He published *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors* in 1904, documenting the sect's pacifist philosophy, historical persecution in Russia, and hopes for a peaceful resettlement as refugees in British Columbia and Canada. While this kind of (over) identification with the political causes of Tolstoy earned Maude the reputation of being more of a 'disciple' than a disinterested critic, it nonetheless exemplifies how the exchange of ideas and sympathies between 'intellectuals' of different countries contributed to the Fabian imagining of a peaceful, international community based on freedom of religion and expression.[90]

Of further interest here is not the fact of Maude's translations of Tolstoy's works, though these represent a remarkable contribution to the reception of Russian literature in the English tradition, but the ideas of solidarity with the Russian novelist and thinker that Maude promoted in his literary criticism and intellectual history. Like Garnett in his reviews of Kropotkin's literary and intellectual history, Aylmer Maude promoted the idea of a 'Republic of Letters' populated by English and Russian intellectuals, based on a shared persecution through statutory censorship and interference. This provided the theme for articles he printed in the British and the American press, and prefaces for his

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[88] Review, 'Far and Near: Notes of the Month,' *The Sunday at Home* (January 1899), 201-04 (201).
[89] Hollingsworth, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890-1917,' 55.
[90] 'Tolstoy off the Pedestal,' *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 106, no. 2765 (October 1908), 3-4 (4).

translations of Tolstoy's literature.[91] In a letter to the *Times* responding to the 1909 Joint Select Committee on the censorship of the stage, Maude made this association explicit. He compared the practice of statutory censorship in England to that under which Tolstoy's *Power of Darkness* was banned in Russia. After reading the *Times* report of the evidence given by William Archer and Bernard Shaw, Maude was reminded, he confided, of an interview between P. M. Ptchelnikof, manager of the Imperial Theatre in Moscow, and Tolstoy. Asked by Ptchelnikof if he would write a sequel to *Fruits of Culture*, Tolstoy reportedly replied, as Maude recalled: '"You would not believe how, from the very commencement of my activity, that horrible Censor question has tormented me! I wanted to write what I felt, but, at the same time, it came into my head that what I wrote would not be passed by the Censor."'[92] Capitalising on his recognised personal intimacy with Tolstoy, Maude argued against English statutory censorship by evoking a parallel between the pressures experienced by English dramatists and those writing under the Russian 'autocracy': though the extent of State interference in the latter case was significantly greater, the experience provided grounds for common sympathy.

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When such instances of cross-cultural exchange between Russians and Fabians are taken into account, Hobsbawm's claim that the Fabians 'took no interest in the traditional international… preoccupations of the left,' and the caricatures of navel-gazing Fabians this claim led to, are thrown into doubt. Benefiting from recent theories of 'cultural internationalism,' we can recover the extent to which key Fabian socialists belonged to, and actively participated in, an international circle living in London at the

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[91] Aylmer Maude, 'Tolstoy's Place in Literature,' *Fortnightly Review* 124, no. 741 (1928), 325-33; Aylmer Maude, 'Tolstoy's Theory of Art,' *The Contemporary Review* 78(1900), 241-54; Aylmer Maude, 'Talks with Tolstoy,' *The New Century Review* 7, no. 41 (1900), 404-18; Aylmer Maude, 'The Czar,' *The Independent* 62, no. 3042 (1907), 655.

[92] Maude Aylmer, 'The Dramatic Censorship,' *The Times*, no. 39028 (1909), 11.

turn of the twentieth century. As literary professionals, they were committed to imagining an international 'Republic of Letters' that was, or ought rightly to be, politically engaged but free from political interference. Through activist groups like the Society for Friends of Russian Freedom, and the translation and dissemination of Russian literature and intellectual history, they saw themselves promoting this liberal, and international, ideal of solidarity.

From their Russian 'colleagues' both in England and abroad, they inherited the concept of an 'intellectual' class, operating in 'unorganised but permanent opposition' to State oppression, and forged by the values of 'Western liberalism.' A highly educated 'circle,' these 'history-makers' believed in the power of 'sympathetic imagination' to teach the British public 'to see and feel,' with Conrad, and to bring about a 'Europeanism' to counter the oppressive weight of State power.[93] Literature—in the Arnoldian sense of all that can be written down or expressed—was a powerful 'instrument,' with Stepniak, in the 'intellectual progress' not only of a nation but the international community into which the liberties of all were inextricably interwoven. Protests, pamphlets, lectures, literary criticism, novels, and intellectual histories all contributed to this sense of promoting Russian political freedom.

[93] Conrad, 'Autocracy and War,' 1-21 (1-2).

Postscript

> For Philistine gives the notion of something particulary stiff-necked and perverse in the resistance to light and its children.[1]
>
> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)

We need to rethink how we approach the founding Fabians and 'Fabianism' if we are to understand who they were, how they saw themselves, and how they were seen by contemporaries beyond the dictates of Marxist and 'literary modernist' polemic. In this polemic, the Fabians have routinely been deemed 'boring,' 'anomalous,' and 'sterile' by those with interests vested in claiming political, cultural, and even, as we have seen, literary authority for themselves.

This polemic can itself be historicised and contextualised, however, to reveal underlying professional, disciplinary, and doctrinal anxieties that have fed into the 'liminalisation,' with Ann Ardis, of 'Fabianism' within contemporary scholarship. From free-floating negations, such as Ezra Pound's denunciation of the 'dehumanizing' Fabian bureaucrats who believed the arts had better not exist at all, to deliberate specifications, such as Raymond Williams' dismissal of non-Webbian versions of 'Fabianism' from *Culture and Society*, these dominant narratives have survived through the universities and been preserved through the conceptual barriers set up between disciplines along assumptions about the 'appropriate' material for particular kinds of studies.

If studied outside the terrain mapped by this polemical tradition, the Fabians and 'Fabianism' emerge in a wholly new light. The methods of cultural history—with its interpretive 'open-mindedness,' and interest in how individuals and groups make and

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[1] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 140.

maintain meaning through texts, social practices, institutions, and identities over time—provide a context within which we can reconsider the early history of the Fabian Society. Widening the parameters of 'Fabianism' to include the founding Fabians' cultural strategies for legitimisation as a newly formed group entering the public domain, their periodical contributions, unpublished archives, and the symbolic aspects of their advocacy on key issues, it becomes clear that the Society's founding members were deeply committed to and engaged with questions of human values and ideas of the public duty of the liberal elite, as well as, or as part of, questions of social reform and State administration. The tools provided by cultural history allow us to appreciate the Fabians' early forays into adjudicating matters of public interest, and the contemporary awareness of this aspect of 'Fabianism.'

Katherine Keeling's 1924 *Blackwood's* short story, which provides the third illustration in the *OED* definition of 'Fabianism' as 'the doctrines and principles of the Fabian Society,' for instance, was in fact set in early 1920s Bolshevik Russia. The eponymous character, Elizabeth, is the Oxford-educated daughter of Russian landowner and aristocrat Prince Nicholas Galtin, a contemporary of Fabians Rupert Brooke and Amber Reeves, and is described as having, despite her wealth and social standing, 'such an instinct for the right value of things, and the true historic sense and such warm human understanding.' Keeling played here with ideas about 'Fabianism' that were, we have seen throughout this thesis, once prevalent—such as their identification with the Russian liberal tradition and second-generation presence in the ancient universities—but that have since been lost from view. 'Fabianism touched' Elizabeth, the *Blackwood's* readership was told, 'during her last year at school, and she became a generous, fine-phrased, academic Socialist. That was quite natural and ordinary, but it had a rather far-

reaching result.'[2] Placed next to Trotsky's caricature of the navel-gazing Fabians in his own 1925 analysis of the Fabian 'theory' of socialism, Keeling's 'far-reaching' 'Fabianism' entitles us to claim that there is more to the early history of 'Fabianism' than the single-story promoted by the dominant narratives of twentieth-century scholarship.

'Light, not Heat'

> The Fabian Society therefore concludes that in the natural philosophy of Socialism, light is a more important factor than heat.[3]
>
> Bernard Shaw, 'Report on Fabian Policy' (1896)

The Fabian Society was deliberately 'out of *rapport*' with traditional British party politics, not only in terms of what Bernard Shaw dismissed as 'The Party System'—'under which "it is the business of the Opposition to oppose"'—but also with traditional, 'doctrinaire Marxism,' which included its own dictatorships, both intellectual and tyrannical.[4] While this principled autonomy caused Marxist historians and more orthodox commentators to denounce 'Fabianism' as 'anomalous,' and 'useless,' it was a conscious and conscientious stance taken to ensure the capacity to approach political questions in a manner divorced from political orthodoxy.[5] The early Fabians sought to 'permeate' other 'Estates of the realm'—the Press, political parties, civil servants, and the public—with Fabian principles: 'light,' and not 'heat,' was the key to this strategy. Through its uniquely qualified membership—the intellectuals, writers, academics, and journalists who joined in the founding decades—the Society sought to bring 'all the pressure and power of persuasion' it could muster to the task of socialising the British public. Interested not 'by what name any party calls itself, or what principles, Socialist or

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[2] Keeling, 'Elizabeth,' 392-93.
[3] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 7.
[4] 'Preface' to the 1930 edition, in Shaw, *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, v-xiv (xi).
[5] 'The Fabians Reconsidered,' in Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, 250-71 (50-56).

other, it professes,' the Fabians collaborated with whatever force could help realise their 'ideas' for a fairer reorganisation of society, while, importantly, 'taking no direct political action' in their own name.[6]

As a result of its 'a-typicality,' with Hobsbawm, the Society was in its earliest years popularly seen as something more like a 'literary society,' a 'mutual elevation society,' or a 'small group of fanciful philosophers' than a political organisation or party. It was not clear, that is to say, that the Fabian Society belonged to the world of practical politics or socialism at all: equally unclear, however, how it could be positioned in relation to the established authorities in British politics, culture, and society. Accordingly, many of the earliest attempts to define 'Fabianism' for the public come not from political but cultural, and specifically literary, commentators. A key example was seen in W. E. Henley's self-consciously literary *National Observer*, which offered, in 'The Future of Literature' and 'The Drama of the Future,' in 1891 two of the earliest definitions of 'Fabianism' in the British press. The literary critic for this journal described 'Fabianism' as a new element in British life, and one hostile to the driving forces of 'pure' literary culture. This was a polemic taken up by the literary *avant-garde* of the 1910s that asserted its own right to evaluate questions of literary value against the 'scrubbing and demolishing' elderly Fabians of Woolf's imagining.[7]

Further, on account of its progressive stance towards the challenges and changes of modernity, 'Fabianism' was treated as one of the 'modernisms' and 'intellectual movements' transforming social relations in Britain, and not necessarily a set of socialist doctrines or principles at all. That is, 'Fabianism' served commentators in the 1890s and early 1900s as a metonymy with a wide and shifting range of associations, and not as a stable, political doctrine. During the 1890s, before a new *avant-garde* had successfully

[6] Shaw, *Report on Fabian Policy*, 3.
[7] Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 33.

asserted its own claims to legitimacy, the Fabians were known as 'the new people,' an identifiable 'class' that initiated the English reading public to the various '-isms' of modernity, from 'Ibsenism' and 'Teetotalism,' to 'Vegetarianism' and the 'new Socialism.'[8]

This broader perspective enables us also to reintegrate the contributions of the female Executive Fabians who were largely responsible for the popular reception of 'Fabianism' through their novels, translations, and reputations as public speakers. As Alice Stronach wrote in 1896, 'Fabianism' was shaped for the 'review-reading public' by the 'literary Fabian women' in its ranks, notably Annie Besant, Constance Garnett, Emma Brooke, and Edith Nesbit. The works—translations, children's literature, periodical journalism, and lectures—that these women contributed to 'Fabianism' are altogether absent from canonical histories vested either in suppressing the literary merit of the 'Edwardians' or quarantining 'Fabian doctrine,' with McBriar, within the 'official' literature in order to offset it against established political doctrine. Tuning into this broader discursive record therefore provides another opportunity for a reconsideration of the way scholars today engage with the founding decades of the Fabian Society, and the Fabian strategies for manipulating the Fabian public image.

'Light and Authority'

Uninterested in the broader range of characteristics delivered by the metonymic use of 'Fabianism,' twentieth-century Marxist historiography roundly condemned the early Fabians and 'Fabianism' for being politically 'anomalous,' neither committed to the 'working-class' movement, nor, within their 'bourgeois' context, relevant to the Liberal or Conservative parties that served 'middle-' and 'upper-class' interests. The works of

[8] Hodgson, 'A Modern Conversation,' 597; Hodgson, 'The Mahatma Period,' 192.

'Fabianism,' we will recall from the introduction of this thesis, 'serve merely to explain to the Fabians themselves why Fabianism exists in the world,' irrespective, as Hobsbawm complained, of the 'British political tradition.'[9]

This thesis has proposed another tradition, however, through which we can engage with the deliberately unorthodox aspects of 'Fabianism,' a tradition with deep roots in nineteenth-century British intellectual history but which has hitherto been omitted from, or not widely recognised in, histories of the early decades of the Fabian Society. For a profitable starting point for considering this alternative tradition, we can turn to Matthew Arnold's evaluation of the particular strengths and contributions of Edmund Burke as a political thinker. Arnold made a virtue of the indifference to party politics that so frustrated the Marxist historians:

> But Burke is so great because, almost alone in England, he brings thought to bear upon politics, he saturates politics with thought…His greatness is that he lived in a world which neither English Liberalism nor English Toryism is apt to enter—the world of ideas, not the world of catchwords and party habits.[10]

Arnold's metaphor for this way of thinking beyond the 'world' of political doctrine was, of course, 'disinterestedness.' In 'Functions of Criticism at the Present Time,' which appeared in the *National Review* in 1864, Arnold explained how 'true criticism'—which tries 'to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind,' and which 'values knowledge and thought as they approach this best, without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever'—should like Burke, be 'disinterested':

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[9] 'The Fabian "Theory" of Socialism,' in Trotsky, *Where is Britain Going?*, 55-56.
[10] Arnold, 'The Functions of Criticism,' 237.

> By keeping aloof from practice; by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches; by steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them quite sufficiently, but which criticism has really nothing to do. Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and, by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas.[11]

'Real criticism' he therefore described (in what seem in this context like Fabian terms) as 'a very subtle and indirect action,' a 'slow and obscure work' that embraces the 'virtue of detachment' and abandons 'the sphere of practical life.' It was an ideal of 'disinterestedness,' and importantly a commitment to reform, that others at the turn of the century identified in Arnold's own way of thinking. As H. Dodwell advised *Macmillan's* readers in his 1905 article 'Matthew Arnold as a Social Reformer': 'we must not seek in him any political system.'[12] In his own oblique relation to organized politics, in his conception of the State as a guardian of the 'best,' and in his liberal belief in the power of 'literature' and 'criticism' in the broadest sense, to 'influence' for good the 'national life and manner' through 'subtle and indirect action,' Arnold was in many ways an intellectual precursor to 'Fabianism.'

We have seen throughout this thesis that the language and legacy of Matthew Arnold is everywhere implicit in the discourse surrounding 'Fabianism,' from the clichéd polemic insisting, with Perry Anderson, on the Fabians' 'bottomless philistinism,' to the overtones of the early Fabian Society's own anti-revolutionary motto, 'light, not heat.'[13] Like Arnold in the 1860s and 1870s, the Fabians found at the turn of the twentieth century 'a practical use for light,' as he had written in *Culture and Anarchy*, 'in correcting' the revolutionary tendency towards 'random and ill-regulated action.' 'What if,' Arnold posed rhetorically, 'our urgent want now is, not to act at any price, but rather to lay in a

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[11] Arnold, 'The Functions of Criticism,' 239-40.
[12] Dodwell, 'Matthew Arnold as a Social Reformer,' 53.
[13] Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis,' 43.

stock of light for our difficulties?'[14] The Fabians found in Arnoldian ideas powerful metaphors for their own way of thinking politically, and for occupying a place as public figures situated between politics, culture, and society.

The work of the Fabian Society, as Edward Pease and Margaret Cole liked to remind the public, was the work of individual members.[15] We find, accordingly, in the Society's early literature, recurrent reflections on the limits and characteristics of the public vocation of the 'intellectual.' The Fabians found in Arnold a model for their own response to the problem of claiming a public position whilst eschewing any recognisable political alliegiance. In providing an example of a bureaucrat who used his own comparative studies on European education systems to underpin his call for the reform of the British system, Matthew Arnold was practically alone among the heavyweights of Victorian culture, as Sidney Webb had observed, in bothering himself with 'the trouble of precise thought about so dull a subject as administrative machinery.' A bureaucrat and a self-professed believer in 'culture,' Arnold may have been a lone voice 'crying in the wilderness,' but he explicitly provided the Fabians with a model of bringing 'disinterested' criticism to public advocacy.

The Fabians made this lineage explicit. As we saw in Chapter 3, the Fabians, and particularly Sidney Webb, Edith Nesbit, and Arthur Clutton-Brock, explicitly aligned themselves with Matthew Arnold in the debates over modern education and in the arguments for a national, public system. In his calls for the 'best' for British teachers and students alike, and in his vision for a concept of '*the State*' as an authority that guaranteed this system, Arnold provided a precursor for the Fabians' advocacy for a national education system that was not only public, but that catered for the imaginative life of the child.

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[14] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 116.
[15] Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 77; Cole, 'The Fabian Society,' 7.

We can also see this Arnoldian legacy at operation in the language the Fabians used to articulate their sense of the relation of the public vocation to politics, culture, and society. From Bernard Shaw's 'disinterested,' 'qualified rulers,' and Beatrice and Sidney Webb's 'disinterested, professional expert,' to Edward Pease's 'disinterested political thinkers,' and Arthur Clutton-Brock's 'disinterested' Fabian 'specialists,' the Fabians used this cultural strategy to legitimise their role as public 'intellectuals' who were dedicated, as Bernard Shaw claimed, to 'high political ideas' over 'petty politics.' Interpreted in this lineage of thought, and not explained away according to a Marxist analytic framework, the early Fabians and 'Fabianism' can be seen as participating in a liberal tradition, which Arnold linked to Burke, of 'disinterested,' public criticism operating beyond the logic of the Tory and Liberal traditions, in a 'world of ideas' within which the 'human' subject was central.

The 1899 *Saturday Review* article introduced in Chapter 2 suggests the Fabians' success, at least among some contemporary observers, in mediating this 'fraught,' with Bruce Robbins, public vocation that was at once beyond 'ulterior' considerations of practical politics and yet politically engaged.[16] The reviewer here wrote, in terms that recall Arnold on Burke, that the 'distinction' of the Fabian 'intellectuals,' who operated by definition 'outside the field of party warfare,' was 'that they consistently apply thought to politics.'[17] Were they to relinquish 'their aloofness from party politics,' which is 'the secret of their influence,' the Fabians would 'cease to be interesting,' and would 'miss their true vocation, which is to educate the public to think for themselves, and to take a serious view of their civic duties.' While some contemporaries recognised this essential strategy of 'Fabianism,' they too tended to operate outside the limits and logic of the political system, and so were similarly vulnerable to the dominant voices of those

[16] Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 12-13.
[17] 'Socialists in Council,' 421.

holding more entrenched political positions. The institutional systems that guaranteed the survival of some records, such as those of the Marxists and 'literary modernists,' ensured that others—particularly popular journalism like this example—were subsequently undervalued.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the Arnoldian consonances in the Fabians' ideas about the vocation of the 'intellectual,' a further correspondence can be traced between the unusual Fabian—latterly, social-democratic—liberalism explored throughout this thesis and Matthew Arnold's idealisation of '*the State*' as 'a centre of light and authority.'[18] As Shaw claimed in the 1909 inquiry into statutory censorship, he conceived 'the law to be the guarantor of liberty.'[19] In practice, this meant a conception of the State not only as a guardian of negative freedoms, but of positive rights too. In their advocacy for a national system of education for all children regardless of class or background, in their formal opposition to statutory censorship of the theatre, and in their expressions of sympathy with the writers and intellectuals suffering under tsarist Russia, the Fabians envisioned an idea of State that protected liberal values, from freedom of speech and press, and the right to own property without State interference, to the democratic ideals of public education and representative government. As Harley Granville Barker had boasted in his 1910 lecture on the 'next phase' of British theatre, 'we are making the State a governing entity in ways undreamed of a generation ago,' in recognising that 'Shakespeare is not only a National Inheritance, but a National Responsibility.'[20]

There is a further liberal dimension to this Fabian identity, which brings us back to the denunciation by Trotsky which introduced this thesis: namely, the Fabian belief in

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[18] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 134.
[19] Samuel, *Report from the Joint Select Committee*, 46.
[20] Granville-Barker, 'The Theatre: The Next Phase,' 636.

the 'power of the "idea,"' and in the power of literature as a vehicle for ideas, in the shaping of the mind and manners of the public. As seen in Chapter 5, Bernard Shaw offered a definition of the value of 'culture' similar to the above description of the Fabian 'intellectual': the role of 'culture,' that is, is to teach the public 'how to think, act, and feel,' beyond the bombast and rhetoric of the political press. The theatre, literature, the press, and all modes of public thought and expression constituted a public service comparable to formal education, and were therefore as worthy of State investment and, importantly, of statutory protection. As Bernard Shaw argued, the theatre, which he described as a 'factory' of 'sentiment,' 'character,' and 'everything that finally determines the destiny of a nation,' was as important as schools in 'making the minds' of the English public, and therefore deserved public funding to secure its continued development.[21] In their advocacy of State support for the theatre, and for the protection of authors' rights, and in their intellectual roots in Arnoldian ways of thinking about 'culture' and 'civilisation,' the founding Fabians in many ways belong to the longer, twentieth-century tradition of State liberalism associated with the founding and mission of cultural institutions like the BBC, the Arts Council, and the National Trust. Granville Barker's vision of a 'Ministry of Fine Arts,' while offered in mock earnest, was nonetheless one expression of the Fabians' thinking of questions of 'promoting the Arts and Sciences in a democratic state.'[22] If the Fabians believed in the gradual, transformative 'power of the "idea"' to change the world, they were in good company: as Matthew Arnold advised, in defence of 'true criticism,' in terms which recall the 'history makers' of Russian intellectual history, 'our ideas will, in the end, shape the world all the better for maturing a little.'[23]

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[21] Shaw, 'The National Shakespeare Theatre And The New Repertory Theatres,' 12.
[22] Granville-Barker, 'The Theatre: The Next Phase,' 633, 636.
[23] Arnold, 'The Functions of Criticism,' 250.

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This thesis has attempted to highlight the methodological payoff that cultural history can provide for students of British literature, culture, and politics. As more of a perspective or point of view than a set of methodological procedures, this discipline has, on account of its latitude, never been more popular. As Peter Burke observed recently of the expanding horizons of cultural history, 'even the lawyers and the biologists' have discovered that there is a symbolic dimension to their work.[24] Lining the shelves of libaries, bookshops, and museum gift stores, accordingly, are cultural histories of British comics and fear, insomnia and menstruation, self-portraiture, modernism, the sea, wedding cakes, London, gardens, impotence, idiocy, ventriloquism, and beyond.[25]

The ongoing improvements in ease and access of online resources have in recent years made this method more viable than ever for scholars of turn-of-the-century British history. By bringing back into consideration texts not conventionally treated in twentieth-century histories—including the more ephemeral records of the periodical press, and particularly articles covering topics that are on the face of it not relevant to the study of British political history—we can reinvigorate how we reconstruct the past, in order to interpret it. This has included, in the present thesis, not only a reassessment of the material considered relevant to the study of 'Fabianism,' but also a conceptual reorientation away from the priorities of social history, with its emphasis on class categories, towards a close examination of the terms by which the founding Fabians represented themselves, and by which they were received by their contemporaries.

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[24] Burke, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Cultural History,' 1.
[25] James Chapman, *British Comics: a cultural history* (London: Reaktion, 2011); Joanna Bourke, *Fear: a cultural history* (London: Virago Press, 2005); Eluned Summers-Bremner, *Insomnia: a cultural history* (London: Reaktion 2010); R. D. Apple, 'Menstruation: A Cultural History,' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 64, no. 1 (2009), 125-27; Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: a cultural history* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); P. E. Steinberg, 'The Sea: A Cultural History,' *Journal of Historical Geography* 38, no. 3 (2012), 349-50; Anke Bernau, *Virgins: a cultural history* (London: Granta 2007); S. R. Charsley, *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1992).

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